INTERCONNECTED LEARNING AND TEACHING

International Journal for Foreign Languages

1 / 2024

ISSN: 3061 - 5283

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Press

https://doi.org/10.47743/ilt-2024-1-1

Interconnected Learning and Teaching.

A Platform for Innovation and Exchange in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Editorial Foreword

The concept of "Interconnected Learning and Teaching" emerged in 2023 as a response to the need for an open forum for discussion in the field of foreign language pedagogy. Initially conceived as a conference focused on German as a Foreign Language, the idea expanded rapidly to bring together a diverse array of experts and practitioners across educational levels and language specializations – from primary school teachers to university didactics specialists, and from English and French teachers to those specializing in Polish and Norwegian. This broad collaboration was born out of the necessity to face common challenges and evolving demands in education today, such as integrating new methodologies shaped by advances in neuroscience and psychology, adapting to rapid developments in computer science and artificial intelligence, and responding to the demands of a globalized world where foreign language learning remains crucial, and is likely to grow in importance.

A key objective of our project was to unite educators across all institutional levels so as to foster an innovative and educational forum, with particular emphasis on university didactics. While the teaching and learning of foreign languages are widely discussed internationally – addressed through various theories and perspectives – university didactics remains a less explored academic subject, with limited practical training available. We view this area as essential to the broader educational landscape, as universities hold primary responsibility for preparing future educators and language specialists. Consequently, the traditional lecture-based and seminar-focused model often creates a considerable gap between the training received and the practical teaching skills needed in professional careers. Education and teaching must therefore be viewed as a continuous cycle, in which each participant is actively engaged in ongoing development to adapt to the evolving challenges of today's educational demands.

In an attempt to address these challenges, the inaugural "ILT Conference" was held in November 2023 in Iaşi, focusing on emerging trends and pressing issues within the context of the post-pandemic educational landscape. While the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the integration of technology and online platforms into

daily classroom practice, the post-pandemic period has revealed a retreat from media use in foreign language instruction. This shift prompted us to examine its underlying causes, leading to the inclusion of workshops and training sessions in the conference. These sessions were designed to build confidence and inspire innovative approaches to incorporating technology in everyday classroom activities. Additionally, we organized roundtable discussions that brought together representatives from various educational institutions and industry leaders – including private schools, multinational corporations, and local retail companies – to explore anticipated trends in the labour market and the competencies expected from graduates of foreign language programs. A second roundtable, involving both public and private educational stakeholders, focused on issues such as expanding the language portfolio in schools and universities and the integration of mandatory teacher training programs.

These discussions hold the potential for significant impact when openly shared, but they achieve broader visibility and influence through dissemination in published form. Building on the outcomes of our inaugural conference, we have compiled a selection of representative discussions from 2023 in an open-access international journal. The articles featured in the *ILT - Interconnected Learning and Teaching. International Journal for Foreign Languages* address topics of substantial relevance to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers engaged in international contexts involving foreign language communication and multilingualism. The journal publishes original, meaningful, and scientifically rigorous contributions across both initial and advanced education, encompassing studies on foreign language teaching (including policies, curricula, pedagogy, and assessment), specialized language and content instruction, CLIL, bi/multilingualism, as well as varied content and instructional environments.

The journal serves as a platform for scholarly discussions on emerging issues in the field, featuring original and rigorous analyses of the policies and practices related to preparing individuals for educational roles across various levels. The studies included in the journal are meant to examine the teaching of foreign languages in general (international perspective) or within specific national contexts (national perspective) or a certain type of education institution (institutional perspective), as well as research focused on the particularities of teaching individual languages such as English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Norwegian, and Russian (language perspective). The journal does not limit itself to theoretical or conceptual studies but also includes qualitative and quantitative empirical research, such as the development and evaluation of didactic materials and the description of educational workshops.

As evident from the Table of Contents of this first issue of the journal, the papers featured cover a wide array of topics, including language teaching, teacher training, curriculum design, materials development, language learning, language testing, teacher education, neurolinguistics, bilingualism and bilingual education, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and pragmatics. While English is the primary language for publication, we welcomed and encouraged submissions in various foreign languages, provided the research addresses the specificities and unique aspects of the language in question (e.g. Italian or German).

All the articles included in this first issue explore diverse and innovative approaches to education, each addressing contemporary challenges and opportunities in various academic fields. Covering mostly the field of university didactics, Vega María García González' article examines the shift to virtual teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the adaptation of the Syriac language instruction through the Flipped Classroom model, highlighting how teaching methods can evolve with technology. In line with university teaching, Anne D. Peiter's article deals with literature didactics, taking on the challenge of teaching about genocidal atrocities, particularly the Shoah and the Rwandan Tutsicide, thus emphasizing the importance of comparative education that not only commemorates past events but also fosters critical thinking aimed at prevention. In the realm of language learning and translation studies, Eva Seidl discusses in her article the concept of mediation in Translation- and Interpreting-oriented Language Learning and Teaching (TILLT), exploring the way in which this emerging sub-field can incorporate mediation without undermining the unique skills and ethical concerns of translation professionals, especially in the light of debates sparked by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Dealing with the didactics of Romanian as a foreign language, Irina Marinela Deftu's article shifts the focus to intercultural identity development, analyzing the way in which foreign students in Romania navigate the complex dynamics of adapting to a new cultural context. The article addresses internal struggles faced by foreign students learning Romanian, and the negotiation between maintaining one's cultural identity and adjusting to a new environment, particularly as students encounter challenges like "personal shock" and the prioritization of cultural tolerance over respect for the host culture.

In the realm of pre-university foreign language didactics, Roxana Nicola's article advocates for alternative assessment methods in young students' education, such as the example provided by the author, namely the use of the phrase "not yet" instead of failing grades. Grounded in Carol Dweck's theory of growth mindset,

the article aims at demonstrating how a focus on progress, rather than fixed evaluations, could motivate students, improve academic outcomes, and reduce dropout rates, suggesting broader applications for educational reform, particularly in systems with high course requirements. Also in the field of pre-university didactics, Alina Podaru's article introduces the concept of storytelling as a creative teaching tool for Italian grammar, illustrating how an imaginary story world (*Articulandia*) could make learning more engaging and interactive for young students, since the method known as "storification" has the potential to encourage greater participation and interest on behalf of the students; at the same time, this method can foster collaborative sharing of pedagogical resources among teachers and educators.

The journal also features the category of Project Description, which contains two articles dealing with practical aspects of teaching foreign languages for specific purposes, a field in which didactics should focus on developing transversal skills, such as the use of specialized terminology in the foreign language, but also intercultural awareness and communication. The first article signed by Cornelia Amălinei, Anna Diaconu, Irina Gheorghiu, Carmen Antoniță, Simona Hultoană, Mădălina Tvardochlib and Andrei Daniel Timofte, discusses a European Union-funded project applied in the case of medical students. Starting from a specific medical field, namely Histology and Histopathology, the project, drawing insights from testimonials provided by teachers and students involved, examines the potential use of multilingual virtual slide libraries and translanguaging strategies to improve the students' reading comprehension. The second project description, signed by Elena Velescu and Oana Cogeanu-Haraga, implies a collaboration between universities, institutions and academic partners from several countries. The project seeks to develop artificial intelligence tools to improve the teaching of veterinary medicine terminology in various languages (French, English and Romanian), thus helping both students and educators in the field.

Altogether, the articles included in this first issue of the *ILT – Interconnected Learning and Teaching. International Journal for Foreign Languages* advocate for flexible, innovative, and student-centered educational practices that respond to the evolving needs of both learners and educators across disciplines. They emphasize the importance of technological adaptation, critical thinking, inclusivity, and ethical considerations in shaping the future of foreign language didactics.

The ILT International Journal is published in collaboration with "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University Printing Press and welcomes contributions from scholars all over the world.

https://doi.org/10.47743/ilt-2024-1-2

Media and Technology in the Teaching of Corpus Languages after the Pandemic: the Syriac Language at the University of Salamanca

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a worldwide compulsory shift from face-to-face teaching to virtual teaching and e-learning at all levels of the educational system. The teaching of the Syriac language, one of the subjects comprised in the Degree in Hebrew and Aramaic Studies offered by the University of Salamanca, Spain, changed from a traditional method with ICT support to a more active one, the Flipped Classroom, adapted to the features of a corpus language. In this paper we aim to show this process of adaptation and the results from several Teaching Innovation Projects compiled over the last four academic years.

KEYWORDS: *Flipped Classroom, Corpus Languages teaching, Syriac, University of Salamanca*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the global health emergency altered most aspects of the society. One of the measures adopted by several governments for the mitigation of the situation was the lockdown and the restriction of the free movement of people. In the field of education, it forced a shift from face-to-face teaching and class attendance to virtual teaching and e-learning based on synchronous and asynchronous lessons. This policy, which affected all levels of regulated education, resulted in a significant increase in the application of ICT to employ resources, design materials, develop active methodologies and guarantee online global open access, with the aim of maintaining the regular lessons at home.

The University of Salamanca, following the directives from the Spanish Government, established online teaching and e-leaning for all its academic programmes until the end of the academic year 2019–2020. Moreover, USAL launched an institutional contingency plan for virtualising subjects through its own platform, Studium. The entire teaching staff was compelled to change their methodologies and make use of ICT to a greater extent than before, or even for the first time.

The Degree in Hebrew and Aramaic Studies offered by the University of Salamanca was affected as well. This Degree encompasses several subjects whose main content is corpus languages, which are usually taught using traditional methods. In the case of the Syriac language, online teaching forced a change in the methodology from a Grammar-Translation Method with the support of ICT to a more active one, the Flipped Classroom, adapting it to the features of a corpus language.

Prior to exposing the process of changing methodologies, we consider it appropriate to provide context for Syriac as a corpus language within the Aramaic linguistic group, along with its teaching within the framework of the Degree.

The Degree in Hebrew and Aramaic Studies of the University of Salamanca

The University of Salamanca, founded in 1218, is one of the oldest universities in the world and the oldest Spanish university in continuous operation. Hebrew and Aramaic Studies enjoy a long-standing tradition at this institution, which dates back to the 14th century. Nowadays, these two fields are the focus of the Degree in Hebrew and Aramaic Studies, which was established along with other degrees in the academic year 2010–2011 according to the European Higher Education Area Guidelines. It is based on Saussure's definition of Philology, which links the study of language to literature, history and culture. (Saussure, [1916] 1967: 13–14) The added value of this Degree lies in its unique curriculum within the European Higher Education Area because it has an equitable distribution of ECTS credits and hours between the two fields, Hebrew Studies and Aramaic Studies.

In relation to Aramaic Studies, the main goals of the Degree acquire specialized knowledge of the languages and dialects of the Aramaic linguistic group, recognizing the value of Aramaic literature, and developing historical and cultural awareness of the significance of Aramaic-speaking peoples in regional and international contexts.

The Syriac language is the main content of two semester-based subjects taught in the first year of the Degree, titled *Aramaic Language I* and *Aramaic Language II*. The aims of these subjects for the students are the acquisition of tools to deal with a text and get an understandable content through analysis, commentary, and translation, while also fostering the global understanding of a text and subsequent critical reflection on it with the support of literature, culture, and history of Syriac-speaking peoples, which they study at the same time.

Syriac language[1]

Before discussing the didactics of the Syriac language, we consider it relevant to offer a short historical overview. Syriac belongs to the Aramaic linguistic group, which is embodied in the Semitic family of languages. This is the distribution of Aramaic into five main stages based on Fitzmyer (1979) and adopted by most scholars, such as Yildiz (2000a) or Rubin (2008), among many others.

I. Ancient Aramaic (950–600 BC)

II. Imperial Aramaic (600–200 BC)

III. Middle Aramaic (200 BC–AD 200)

IV. Late Aramaic (AD 200–1300 AD)

V. Modern Aramaic (1300 AD to the present)

Syriac is one of the most important languages of the Aramaic linguistic group, spanning the Middle and Late Aramaic stages. It had been originally spoken since third or second century BC in ʾUrhay, Edessa, now Şanlıurfa (Turkey), located 50km from the border with Syria. The city and its surrounding area have been inhabited since ancient times and have historically served as significant crossroads. Because of the early spread of Christianity in the region, it had been adopted as liturgical and cultural language by the new Christian communities in the Eastern Roman and Sassanid empires since 3rd century CE.

The Christological controversies about the nature or natures of Christ caused a dogmatic schism in the 5th century along with a geographical and linguistic division into two dialects, Eastern and Western ones. The Syriac language reached its peak during the 7th and 8th centuries, when these communities disseminated across the East to present-day India and China for a missionary purpose. Besides, their scholars played a significant role in the history of knowledge transfer. They translated scientific and religious works written in Greek into Syriac, which were

[1] The term *Syriac* derives from the toponym *Syria*. During the 6th century BC, the *lingua franca* of the Near and Middle East was an Aramaic *koiné*. In 538 BC, Cyrus the Great allowed the Jewish people to return to their region from exile in Babylon and they maintained the Aramaic language, as it is shown in the Old Testament. According to Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia ([1967] 1997), the term *ʾarāmīt* appears in the verses of 2 Kgs 18, 26, Ezr 4, 7 and Dan 2, 4 and could be translated as "[in] Aramaic [language]". However, the Septuagint (2006) and the Vulgate ([1969] 1994) translated this word as συριστι into Greek and syriace into Latin, respectively. This is since the Greeks associated the name of the area where the Jewish people lived, Syria, with the language of its inhabitants, Syriac, although it was a dialect of Aramaic which was spoken throughout the entire Near and Middle East. Subsequently, Saint Jerome made use of the same term as the Septuagint in the Vulgate. Yildiz (2000b: 274) argues that this name is artificial and lacks historical bases, but it is commonly used by most of the scholar community.

later translated into Arabic sponsored by Abbasid caliphs. Finally, these works were rediscovered in Latin Medieval Europe.

After the Muslim conquest, the Arabic language progressively replaced Syriac as the cultural and vehicular language, leading to a significant decline in its use by the 14th century. Today, Syriac remains the liturgical and literary language of several Christian churches spread across the Near and the Middle East, as well as other parts of the world.

The study of this language, along with other Aramaic and Oriental languages such as Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldaic or Chaldean in Europe, experienced significant growth during the Council convened in the French town of Vienne between 1311 and 1312. The teaching of these languages was ordered through the establishment of chairs at the medieval European Universities of that time, including Salamanca, Oxford, Paris and Bologna, in order to spread the Christian faith among the non-Christian peoples.

The first generation of European scholars appeared in the 16th century, devoted to the printing of grammars, Biblical versions and the texts included in the Polyglot Bibles of Antwerp (1569–1572), Paris (1628–1645) and London (1654–1657). They were assisted by the support of Aramaic-speaking priests. During the 18th century the First Custodian of the Vatican Library, the Maronite polymath Joseph Simon Assemani (1687–1768), among other Papal legates, brought to Rome a huge amount of Syriac manuscripts from various monasteries in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. This compilation labor, and the arrival of new manuscripts at the British Museum and other European libraries during the 19th century led to the peak of Syriac studies.

Between the 19th and the 20th centuries, this subject became independent from the field of theological studies and developed into a secular field of research, undergoing a significant increase in all areas, including language, literature, history and culture, not only in Europe but all over the world. Nowadays the development of information and communication technology (ICT), and the global access to internet have led to an unprecedented boom in Syriac studies. This has enabled the access to virtual teaching, the digitization of manuscripts and discontinued works, freely available online, or the publication of digital volumes and journals, and other projects.

Syriac as a Corpus Language

Langslow (2002: 23–24) uses the term *Corpus Language* to describe a language which is still spoken and written in the present but does not have exclusive native speakers. This definition can encompass Classical and Biblical languages such as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac, among others.

The teaching of Corpus Languages has traditionally made use of the Grammar-Translation Method, which has as a main goal the understanding and study of texts in their original languages. (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 5–7) It is different from the first aim of studying Modern languages, which is communication. According to this method, the teacher explains the grammar in a deductive way and in the language of the students, who memorize it along with lists of vocabulary. The grammatical knowledge acquired is applied to the analysis, translation and back-translation of literary pieces. Therefore, the focus is not on oral communication but on reading and writing skills, and learning grammar is a means to understand foreign literature, rather than an end in itself.

Since the 20th century, several scholars have advocated for the use of communicative methods in teaching Corpus Languages as well as Modern languages, even though they have distinctive features and aims of study: Modern languages have real native speakers and their main learning goal is to use them as a vehicle of communication, whereas Corpus languages are not unique mother tongues and the main purpose of learning them is to understand written texts, so grammar plays a different and more prominent role in corpus languages than in modern languages instruction. (Hakola & Kilunen, 2008: 677–679)

The teaching of Syriac at the University of Salamanca

The teaching of Syriac at the University of Salamanca follows the European Higher Education Area Guidelines, which promote the student-centered learning approach, the acquisition of skills and competences and the use of active methodologies with the support of ICT. (Martínez Lirola, 2007: 37)

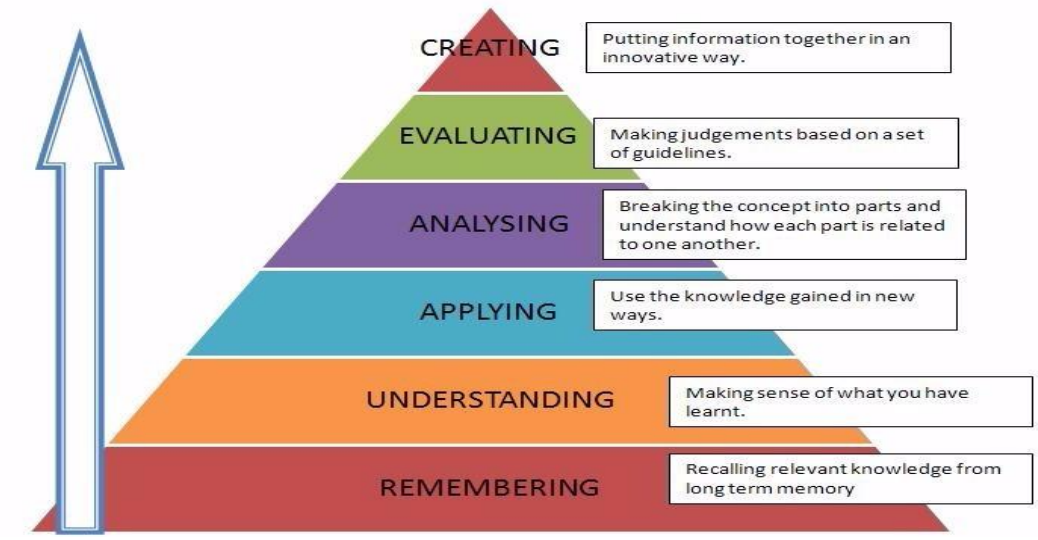
Before the pandemic, the teaching of Syriac language used the Grammar-Translation method with the support of ICT. (García González, 2020) Students were trained to carry out morphological and syntactic analyses to obtain accurate translations and comprehension, being able to offer critical reflections about it based on the extensive philological knowledge acquired. The institutional virtual

platform Studium provided them with permanent access to the materials and digital resources but also enabled asynchronous communication with the teacher.

As stated above, after the outbreak of COVID-19 the faculties of the University of Salamanca were forced to make the transition from face-to-face teaching to e-learning and to convert the subjects to an online format. As a result, during the last months of the academic year 2019–2020, we created some videos with the planned content that were available for students on Studium, along with exercises they had to do and upload to the platform in order to get online feedback. This pilot experience led to the full implementation of the Flipped Classroom methodology, which we have been practising since then.

Flipped Classroom methodology (FCM)

Traditionally, in-class time is focused on the transmission of information from the teacher, the main active agent, to the student, the passive receiver, through expository teaching, while the autonomous worktime outside the classroom is devoted to practical activities. The Flipped Classroom consists of switching or flipping the cognitive processes involved during the face-to-face class and the autonomous worktime outside the classroom. According to Bloom's Taxonomy presented in 1956 and revised by Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) on the six levels of increasing cognitive complexity, the two lowest ones are practised outside the classroom because they may be carried out by students independently, whereas classroom worktime is dedicated to the other four higher levels because the support of teachers is necessary.


CREATING
Putting information together in an innovative way.
EVALUATING
Making judgements based on a set of guidelines.
ANALYSING
Breaking the concept into parts and understand how each part is related to one another.
APPLYING
Use the knowledge gained in new ways.
UNDERSTANDING
Making sense of what you have learnt.
REMEMBERING
Recalling relevant knowledge from long term memory

Therefore, the main goal of the Flipped Classroom methodology is to achieve active, autonomous, significant, and permanent learning for students, in accordance with the EHEA Guidelines.

This methodology is included in blended learning and can be described as a combination of remote and face-to-face teaching. It emerged at the end of the 20th century and experienced a boom at the beginning of the 21st century due to technological development and the integration of ICTs in education. (Prieto et al., 2021: 157–158) Nowadays digital materials and resources for learners are hosted on secure digital platforms with permanent online access and download options.

FCM provides advantages for both students and teachers. On the one hand, this methodology encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning process, learning times and places. Besides, it fosters active, significant and permanent learning through student involvement allowing class time to focus on complex cognitive processes with the support of the teachers.

On the other hand, teachers can identify difficulties or problems through the feedback provided by students given by the students. They offer real-time feedback during lessons, carrying out formative assessment. Moreover, they must carry out significant planning, content selection, creation of activities and materials, and the design of formative assessment.

Flipped Classroom for Syriac language teaching

For the implementation of the Flipped Classroom in Syriac language teaching, we followed the Curriculum development process, divided into three phases. The first one is the Planning phase, focused on identifying learners and their needs regarding the context. The Design phase is the second one, where we consider competences, objectives, and content along with the chosen methodology and materials. The third and last phase is the Evaluation phase, which includes criteria, types, instruments, and agents of evaluation.

During the Planning phase we established a distinct student profile based on age, nationality, labour and family situations of the learners using statistical data. Since the first academic year of the Degree in Hebrew and Aramaic Studies, 2010–2011, until 2022–2023, a total of 40 students have enrolled in the Syriac language courses, *Aramaic Language I* and *Aramaic Language II*, of which 15 are women (37,5%) and 25 are men (62,5%).

Most of them are in the age range 21-25 years old, 13 out of 40 (33%) falling within this category. As a result, these students show a higher level of intellectual maturity than other younger peers and they typically have previous university training. Besides, their decision to enrol in this Degree is conscious and based on true and real interest in these Studies. Their age influences their personal and family situations as well. Some of them have a job while studying and may be caretakers in charge of dependents, either adults or minors, circumstances that are less common among younger students.

Regarding the nationality, out of 40 students, 13 are from other countries (32,5%), with only one being an Erasmus student. More precisely, 6 are from European countries (15%), 6 from Latin America (15%) and one from Saudi Arabia (2,5%). This indicates the international interest in this Degree within and beyond the EHEA, highlighting the high number of non-Spanish-speaking students.

In the Design phase, in alignment with the objectives and competences, we decided to implement the Flipped classroom methodology. As previously mentioned, teachers provide information to students, who work on it before the lesson and outside the classroom, so that face-to-face class time is for practising and deepening their understanding of the content, resolving doubts and doing activities. The course consists of three hours per week, one hour on Wednesdays and two hours on Thursdays. Therefore, students have the materials available online for download from Thursday through the following Wednesday to work on them.

Regarding the materials, our main tool is a series of twelve videos we have created focusing on the Syriac verbal system. We have also designed a specific template for taking notes easily from the videos, based on Cornell Notes System[2], although its use is not compulsory. The last self-made resources are verbal paradigms and exercises for analysing verbal forms.

Finally, the Evaluation phase comprises both summative and formative assessments. For the first one, we gather quantitative data through written tests made up of the same exercises. For the formative assessment, we receive qualitative information collected during the class, where we dedicate time to complex cognitive processes, and we offer immediate feedback to the students.

[2] Cornell Notes System is a note-taking system devised by Walter Pauk, professor at Cornell University, New York, in the 1950s. It consists of synthesizing the most relevant aspects of each subject using a sheet of paper divided into four different areas in order to write down key ideas, lecture notes and a summary of the most important points. (Pauk & Owens, 2011: 235 277)

Teaching Innovation Projects

The results of the implementation of FCM for Syriac teaching have been compiled and analysed through two Teaching Innovation Projects (TIPs) we have conducted in recent academic years. These projects are carried out within the annual call convened by the University of Salamanca[3].

In the framework of these two TIPs, we designed three surveys to gather students' feedback and opinions on the Flipped Classroom methodology, and assess their learning performance. These surveys, created using Google Forms, contained open and closed questions and had to be filled in at different points during the semester. The first one was a preliminary survey to find out if the respondents were familiar with this methodology and their access to the internet and electronic devices, essential for the implementation of the Flipped Classroom. The second one was conducted during the course and asked students about different aspects of FCM, along with a self-assessment of their performance. The third and last survey is an end-of-course questionnaire, which is focused on getting students' final feedback on this experience and a final self-evaluation of their evolution as learners, along with their suggestions for improvement and other aspects they would like to highlight.

We have chosen several items from the third survey in order to show the opinions of the respondents about the Flipped Classroom methodology and their performance as students, along with their final considerations about this experience. To make the information more accessible, we have gathered the answers of the students, a total of 5 respondents, 4 women and 1 man. The man is Chilean and one of the women is French; the others are Spanish. 3 of the women are in their twenties, whereas the French woman is 36 years old, and the Chilean man is 43. None of them has other jobs or personal responsibilities, such as caring for children or dependents.

FCM Practical aspects items

The first four items present a series of statements about different aspects of the Flipped Classroom Methodology that are answered using a Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree*, *disagree, agree* to *strongly agree*.

[3] *ID2020/0159 Implementation of Flipped Classroom methodology for Late Eastern Aramaic* and *ID2022/0234 Student' self-evaluation during the Corpus Languages teaching-learning process: Late Eastern Aramaic.*

Item 1 includes five statements related to the material used in this methodology:

1. I have been able to easily access the material via Studium.

2. The material was sufficient to understand the contents.

3. The videos contain the necessary information to follow the course.

4. The exercises have helped me to consolidate the contents of the course.

5. The number of exercises designed by the teacher was sufficient.

All students have chosen *agree* or *strongly agree* as their answers for these statements. 5 out of 5 *strongly agree* with the first statement, whereas for the fourth and the fifth statements 4 out of 5 *strongly agree* along with 1 *agree*, and for the second and the third statements there are 3 *strongly agree* and 2 *agree*.

Item 2 presents four statements referring to various practical aspects:

1. The planning of the course seemed adequate to me.

2. The distribution of the work throughout the term has been adequate.

3. The face-to-face classes have focused on reinforcing the knowledge previously acquired in an autonomous way.

4. This methodology has allowed me to realize my strengths and weaknesses.

The character of the answers is similar for this item. Statements 1 and 2 gather 4 *strongly agree* and 1 *agree*, the third one reaps 3 *strongly agree* and 2 *agree*. However, the fourth and last one collects 2 *strongly agree*, 2 *agree* and 1 *disagree*.

Item 3 follows the dynamics of the previous questions, in this case with statements about the role of the teacher:

1. The teacher explained the methodology at the beginning of the course.

2. The teacher presented the weekly autonomous work according to the planning.

3. The teacher adequately solved the doubts that were raised.

4. The teacher's explanations were essential for me to understand the contents.

All answers are *strongly agree* for the statements 1 and 2, along with 4 *strongly agree* and 1 *agree* for the third statement and 3 *strongly agree* and 2 *agree* for the

fourth and last statement. The opinions of the students are favourable, according to the results.

Item 4 finishes with six general statements about the Flipped Classroom Methodology:

1. The FCM is effective for corpus language learning.

2. The face-to-face classes are necessary to solve doubts and consolidate the information.

3. Audiovisual material always accessible allows for adequate time management.

4. The teacher's guidance is essential to follow the course.

5. This methodology adapts to the learning pace of each student.

6. The commitment of the students to the course is necessary for this methodology to be effective.

This item earns a majority of *strongly agree*, such as the second statement, while the sixth and last one shows 4 *strongly agree* and 1 *agree* along with 3 *strongly agree* and 2 *agree* for the third statement. Nevertheless, statements number 1, 4 and 5 have received 4 *strongly agree* and 1 *disagree*.

As we can observe, most results on different aspects of the Flipped Classroom Methodology such as materials, practicality, the role of the teacher and other issues are highly positive, despite the unfavourable opinion of a single respondent.

Self-evaluation items

The next item we want to show asks students to self-evaluate their performance in this subject through various statements, following the same Likert scale as before.

1. I consider that my commitment towards the subject has been adequate.

2. I believe that I have taken advantage of the opportunities this methodology has offered me.

3. I have tried to organize my time in order to keep up with the course.

4. This methodology has made it easier for me to learn the Syriac language.

One respondent *disagreed* with all the statements, in comparison with the other four students who have selected positive responses: 3 *strongly agree* and 1 *agree* for the first three statements and even 4 *strongly agree* for the fourth and last one.

To complete the question, they had the opportunity to explain why their performance was not satisfactory. Four of the students had nothing to comment, while the fifth one, the student who chose the option *disagree* in the previous items, a Spanish 22-year-old woman, believed that she had not been able to "take advantage of the methodology due to the way I have to study and understand both the classes and their study."

FCM Strong and weak points

The last items are open questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the Flipped Classroom Methodology and the subject. The same respondent, a Spanish 22-year-old woman, thinks the strongest point is the permanent availability of the explanatory videos, which allow one to consult them whenever necessary. However, in line with her previous answers, "the fact of not offering the contents in class affects my study."

According to the Chilean 43-year-old man, "taking notes on my own from the videos and assimilating the information gives me more autonomy in my learning. The teacher's support helped me to detect my recurring mistakes and to clarify what I did not understand the first time." With a view to the weak points, he considers preliminary exercises prior to watching the videos as necessary and useful, being a warming-up and preparation for the content.

In the opinion of the Spanish 20-year-old woman, "since these are old languages and one needs time to assimilate the information, being able to study them before class gave me the time I needed to process the information and reinforce it in class with the teacher." She did not perceive any weaknesses.

The French 36-year-old woman considers that this methodology "has allowed me to progress at my own pace, spending more time on more complex points or quickly review simpler ones, which is not possible during a face-to-face class." Besides, since Spanish is not her mother tongue, the permanent availability of the videos improved her understanding and made it easier for her to take notes and avoid mistakes. She did not indicate any weak points.

For the last respondent, a Spanish 18-year-old woman diagnosed with dyslexia, FCM offered her the opportunity "to organise my study time in a better way and

to watch the videos again in order to solve doubts." She regards the dependence of the Flipped Classroom on the technology as a weakness, because the availability of the material lies in the proper function of the internet and the electronic devices.

As it can be seen from the answers of the respondents, we can summarize the strongest points of the Flipped Classroom methodology in the permanent online availability of the materials before class time. This allows students to manage their own time and pace and to gain autonomy in their learning, which is reinforced by the face-to-face classes. Other strengths mentioned refer to the work of the teacher, who has contributed to solving errors and to the complete understanding of the content, or to the usefulness of the exercises of verbal forms in increasing the fluency. However, the weakness is the dependence on access to internet and electronic devices to work on the materials.

Final conclusions

To sum up, the Flipped Classroom Methodology is appropriate for the teaching of Syriac language as a Corpus Language for various reasons. First, it is an active student-centred methodology which promotes autonomous, significant, and permanent learning, as we have already explained, in accordance with the European Higher Education Area guidelines.

Besides, it is fit for our students who show various profiles with distinctive features such as age, nationality, learning difficulties or labour and family situations. The continuous online availability and downloading of materials and resources allow them to manage their own learning time and pace according to their personal circumstances.

Finally, the use of active methodologies for the teaching of corpus languages, historically taught through traditional methods based on the learning of grammar and translation, represents an innovative change. The most favourable results of the experience we have carried out show that it is viable to explore innovations in the teaching-learning process of these kinds of languages.

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https://doi.org/10.47743/ilt-2024-1-3

„Hier ist kein Warum!“ Zum Verschwinden des historischen Sinns während der Shoah und des Tutsizids in Ruanda

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ABSTRACT

Based on autobiographical testimonies in which witnesses of the Shoah and the Rwandan tutsicide provide information about themselves, the article endeavours to determine the didactic opportunities that lie in the difficulty of approaching genocidal crimes and their extreme, “normally” incomprehensible atrocities with the question of “why?”. Following Raul Hilberg's research, who considered it possible to reconstruct the events that led to the Shoah, but not to answer this question, the danger is emphasised that the lack of understanding on the part of those who experienced the respective catastrophe will open the door to negationist positions. But in reality, not understanding can also become a stimulus for dealing with a central question. On the one hand, the call of “Never again!” has characterised the period after the Shoah. On the other hand, this call could not be realised in 1994. New, comparative teaching content must therefore be included in lessons that is more seriously geared towards the idea of prevention. Tutsicide should therefore be seen as a supplement to the study of the Shoah.

KEYWORDS: *Shoah, genocide against the Tutsi of Rwanda, genocide prevention, limits of historical understanding, violence against infants*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Ausgehend von autobiographischen Zeugnissen, in denen Zeug:innen der Shoah und des ruandischen Tutsizids über sich selbst Auskunft geben, bemüht sich der Artikel, die didaktischen Chancen zu bestimmen, die in der Schwierigkeit beschlossen liegen, sich genozidalen Verbrechen und ihrer extremen, „normal“ nicht mehr begreiflichen Grausamkeiten mit der Frage nach dem „Warum?“ zu nähern. In Anlehnung an die Forschung Raul Hilbergs, der zwar die Rekonstruktion der Hergänge für möglich hielt, die zur Shoah führten, nicht aber die Beantwortung besagter Frage, wird die Gefahr herausgestellt, dass das aussetzende Verstehen auf Seiten derer, die die jeweilige Katastrophe erlebt hatten, negationistischen Positionen Tür und Tor zu öffnen droht. Doch in Wirklichkeit kann das Nicht-Verstehen auch zum Stimulans für die Beschäftigung mit der Frage werden, wie aus der Tatsache, dass der Ruf des „Nie wieder!“, der die Zeit nach der Shoah prägte, nicht hat eingelöst werden können, neue, vergleichende, ernsthafter auf den Präventionsgedanken hin strebende Lehrinhalte in den Unterricht einbezogen werden können. Der Tutsizid ist damit als Ergänzung für die Beschäftigung mit der Shoah zu betrachten.

SCHÜSSELWÖRTER: *Shoah, Genozid an den Tutsi Ruandas, Genozidprävention, Grenzen des historischen Verstehens, Gewalt gegen Säuglinge*

Una vita d'inferno, senza luce, senz'aria,
bastonati per ogni nonnulla. (Piazza 1995, 118)[1]
Era tutto così irreale! (Mieli 2015, 58)[2]

Unmögliches Verstehen

Ausgehend von autobiographischen Zeugnissen Überlebender der Shoah und des Tutsizids in Ruanda möchte ich dem extremen Machtgefälle nachgehen, das sich in der von Primo Levi dokumentierten Antwort eines SS-Mannes auf die Frage nach dem „Warum" der Auschwitzer Gewalt kondensierte: „Hier ist kein Warum!" (Levi, 2005),[3] war Levi belehrt worden, als er sich in anfängerhafter Naivität nach dem Grund eines völlig sinnlosen Verbots – nämlich dem, seinen Durst zu stillen – zu erkundigen wagte. Was wird aber aus historischem Lernen, wenn die Frage nach so etwas wie „Sinn" ihren Sinn verliert und nur noch die Verweigerung zum Austausch von Seiten der Täter analysiert werden kann – schlicht, weil die Arbitrarität einer total gewordenen Macht sich jeder Gegenfrage enthoben wusste?

Die psychologische Verwirrung, die sich auf Seiten der Opfer ausbreitete, als sich ihnen alle bekannten, zivilisatorischen Erklärungs- und Erwartungsmuster entzogen hatten, soll im Folgenden als Thema historischen Lernens problematisiert werden. Ich gehe aus von paradigmatischen Sätzen des italienischen Juden Bruno Piazza, der mit Blick auf seine Deportationserfahrung schreibt: „Es war sinnlos, Fragen zu stellen oder zu versuchen, etwas in Erfahrung

[1] „Ein Leben in der Hölle, ohne Licht, ohne Luft, mit Schlägen für Nichts-und-wieder-Nichts." [Übers. A.P.]

[2] „Es war alles so irreal!" [Übers. A.P.]

[3] Ich zitiere die gesamte Passage: „Vous n'êtes pas à la maison. – Ed è questo il ritornello che da tutto ci sentiamo ripetere: non siete piu a casa, questo non è un sanatorio, di qui non si esce che per il Camino (cosa vorrà dire? lo impareremo bene piu tardi). E infatti: spinto dalla sete, ho adocciato, fuori di una finestra, un bel ghiacciolo a portata di mano. Ho aperto la finestra, ho staccato il ghiacciolo, ma subito si è fatto avanti uno grande e grosso che si aggirava là fuori, e me lo ha strappato brutalmente. – Warum? – gli ho chiesto nel mio povero tedesco. – Hier ist kein Warum, – (qui non c'è perché), mi ha risposto, ricacciandomi dentro con uno spintone. La spiegazione è ripugnante ma semplice: in questo luogo è proibito tutto, non già per resposte ragioni, ma perché a tale scopo il campo è stato creato." (Levi, 2005). („'Vous n'êtes pas à la maison." – „Das ist der kleine Kehrreim, das uns von allen endlos wiederholt wurde: Ihr seid nicht mehr Zuhause, das hier ist kein Sanatorium, von hier kommt man nur über den Schornstein raus (was wollte das bloß sagen? Weit später erfuhren wir's). Und in der Tat: Umgetrieben vom Durst, habe ich vor einem Fenster einen schönen, leicht erreichbaren Eiszapfen entdeckt. Ich habe das Fenster geöffnet, den Eiszapfen abgebrochen, doch sofort kam ein Großer, Dicker herbeigestürzt, der draußen herumging, und hat ihn mir brutal aus der Hand geschlagen. – Warum? – fragte ich ihn in meinem armseligen Deutsch. – Hier ist kein Warum, – hat er mir geantwortet und mich dabei mit einem Stoß weggejagt. Die Erklärung ist widerwärtig, doch simpel: An diesem Ort ist alles verboten, doch nicht etwa aus guten Gründen, sondern weil das Lager mit diesem Ziel geschaffen worden ist." [Übers. A.P.]

zu bringen: Niemand wusste auch nur irgendetwas. In mir gingen Hoffnung und Verzweiflung permanent ineinander über." (Piazza, 1995: 154) [Übers. A.P.]

Viele Menschen reagierten sowohl in Europa als auch in Ruanda im Kontext des jeweiligen Genozids zu langsam auf die erodierende Möglichkeit des Verstehens. Wer nicht versuchte, den Prozessen der Identifikation und räumlichen Konzentration zu entgehen,[4] die dem Bestreben der jeweiligen Mordmaschinen vorausgingen, der anvisierten Opfer dann auch physisch habhaft zu werden, hatte äußerst geringe Chancen, zu überleben (Peiter, 2024a).

Der in gewisser Weise zu enge, zu sehr der „Normalität" verhaftete Erwartungshorizont der Opfer muss nun aber in die historische Analysen einbezogen werden, wenn es darum gehen soll, Aktionen und Reaktionen, das Funktionieren von Mordmaschinen und den Versuch der Verfolgten zu verstehen, mit der Bedrohung auf irgendeine Weise umzugehen. Viele historische Akteur:innen orientierten sich kultur- und zeitübergreifend an ihren vorherigen Erfahrungswelten bzw. an einem kollektiven Habitus, der minimalen Schutz zu versprechen schien, und diese Bezugnahme erklärt, warum ihre Entscheidungen und Reaktionen rückblickend als „unangemessen" erscheinen (Hilberg, 1990). Verwirrend ist, dass heutige Lerner:innen es leicht „besser wissen" könnten, „besser zu wissen" *meinen*. Sie wundern sich darüber, warum die Verfolgten nicht rechtzeitig die Flucht ergriffen oder die Gefahr zumindest als real erkannten.

Zugleich tut sich bei der Beschäftigung mit den Genoziden auch die Schwierigkeit auf, in die interne „Logik" der Vernichtung einzudringen, d.h. „verstehend" die Perspektive der Täter:innen in den Blick zu nehmen. Von zwei Seiten also bringen Ereignisse von extremster Massengewalt didaktische Schwierigkeiten hervor. Dass sie sozusagen zum „gewohnten" Repertoire an historischen Themen (gerade zum 20. Jahrhundert) gehören, heißt durchaus nicht, dass das Problem des Nicht-Verstehens im Geschichtsunterricht allgemein „gelöst" worden wäre. Die Arbeit an Geschichte geht in die Arbeit mit moralischen Fragen über, Verstehen und Nicht-Verstehen sind auf eigene Weise miteinander vermischt.

Aus dieser Dialektik ist der Schluss zu ziehen, dass ein Perspektivwechsel einzuüben ist, um auf diese Weise den „Zivilisationsbruch" zu fassen, der auch einen Bruch im Verstehen der Verfolgten nach sich zog. Ruth Klüger postuliert, dass Kinder in der Shoah die Gefährlichkeit der Situation oft besser begriffen

[4] In Ruanda war zu Beginn der 1930er Jahre von den belgischen Kolonisator:innen die Pflicht eingeführt worden, die jeweilige Zugehörigkeit zu einer der drei vermeintlich feststehenden „Ethnien" in die Pässe einzutragen. Dies wurde sechs Jahrzehnte später zur Grundlage des Tutsizids (Human Rights watch, 1995).

hätten als Erwachsene, die noch in ihrem Vertrauen zu ihrer bisherigen, sozialen Integration und den Beharrungskräften einer Zivilisation verharrten, die so „modern" und „fortschrittlich" zu sein schien, dass sie das Äußerste nicht wagen würde (Klüger, 1996). Wie kann man im Unterricht Zeugnisse von Überlebenden ganz unterschiedlichen Alters gewichten? Inwieweit ist es möglich, das Nicht-Verstehen der Opfer zum Objekt eines Lernens zu machen, das gewohnt ist, eher Verstehensprozesse in den Blick zu nehmen denn deren Scheitern? Man könnte die Frage auch in andere Formen gießen: Wie kann für Schüler:innen nachvollziehbar gemacht werden, dass etwas, was heute als „Fehlreaktion" gelten könnte, durchaus zum Erwartbaren gehörte? Doch erwartbar so, dass heute dennoch der zivilisatorische Bruch erfahren wird?

An dieser Stelle kommt erneut die Perspektive der Täter ins Spiel. Wie verhielten sich diese zum Verstehen oder Nicht-Verstehen der Opfer? Inwieweit gerät das heutige Verstehen an neue Grenzen, weil die Täter dem *Plan* folgten, die Opfer zu täuschen und über den Zweck bestimmter Maßnahmen im Unklaren zu lassen? Wie muss aber auch umgekehrt das Furchtbarste als Teil einer Wirklichkeit gewertet werden, die eben keineswegs „dämonisch" war (Browning, 2016), sondern ihre eigenen Routinen und „Werte", ihren eigenen Alltag, ihre eigene Repulsionssphäre mit „Sichtblenden" gegen das Unerträglichste entwickelte? (Peiter, 2024b) Wie also umgehen mit Kontinuitäten, die nicht weniger verstörend sind als die Brüche, sondern vielleicht sogar noch schockierender? (Peiter, 2023a) Kurz: Was macht man mit der „Normalität" des komplett Unnormalen?

Während man mit Blick auf die Shoah, Klüger folgend, vielleicht mitunter von einer Umkehrung der „Hierarchien des Verstehens" zwischen Kindern und Erwachsenen sprechen kann, zeichneten sich in Ruanda andere Tendenzen ab. Dort war es seit 1959 regelmäßig zu Pogromen, Plünderungen, Vertreibungen und Vergewaltigungen gekommen (Prunier, 1995). Gewalt hatte das Leben der Tutsi schon seit langem und mit großer Regelmäßigkeit begleitet, ja mehr noch: Bestimmte Pogrome wurden zumindest rückblickend als „kleine Genozide" klassifiziert, was wiederum hieß, dass der Einbruch des Sinnlosen integral zum Alltag zu zählen pflegte (Gourevitch, 1998). Ein regelrechtes Gewohnheitswissen hatte sich verbreitet, das sich stets von Neuem in Resignation oder der Entscheidung zugunsten des Exils ausdrückte (Brandstetter, 2001).

Andererseits war jedoch die Schnelligkeit der Tötungsmaschine des Jahres 1994 nicht absehbar gewesen. Der Abschuss des Flugzeugs des ruandischen Präsidenten am 6. April reichte aus, um das Fanal zu den von langer Hand geplanten Tötungsaktionen zu geben. Es ist bezeugt, dass in der Hauptstadt Kigali

kaum eine Stunde nach Bekanntwerden des Attentats Straßensperren errichtet worden waren, die den Versuch gemäßigter Hutu oder ethnisch den „Tutsi" zugeordneten Personen unterbinden sollten, aus der Stadt zu fliehen (Dumas, 2014). In diesem Fall war praktisch nichts mehr zu begreifen, es blieb keine Zeit, sich um Informationen oder Rettungswege zu bemühen. Vielmehr setzte sich die tödliche Gefahr mit einem Schlage absolut. Und als nach der brutalen Ermordung von zehn belgischen Blauhelmsoldaten auch noch die UNO-Truppen abgezogen wurden, standen der Katastrophe keine Schranken mehr im Weg. Oreste Incimatata, ein zu den „Tutsi" gehörender Priester, berichtet mit Blick auf Vorgänge in der Provinz und den Zeitindex der dortigen Gewalt:

> Ich erfuhr vom Tod des Präsidenten Habyarimana am Morgen des 7. April um 5 Uhr 50. An diesem Tag sagte mir nach der Messe eine Frau aus Gasetsa, dass die Morde angefangen hätten. Am Nachmittag folgte der Sektor von Bisenga. Wir erwarteten zwar tutsifeindliche Verfolgungen. Wir waren daran gewöhnt. Immer, wenn es Probleme gab, dienten die Tutsi als Sündenböcke. In den Meetings kündigte man ihre Vernichtung an. Bei jedem Vormarsch der FPR wurden die Tutsi zusammengetrieben, ins Gefängnis geworfen und getötet. Das war keineswegs überraschend. Was jedoch eine Überraschung war, das waren die Größenordnung sowie die Reichweite des Genozids (Prudhomme, 2019: 375–376). [Übers. A.P.]

Thesen zum „Verstehen"

Die folgenden Überlegungen verstehen sich als Beitrag zum Genozidvergleich. Sie gehen von der These aus, dass der Sinn von Forschungen zu Ursprüngen und zur Funktionsweise von Gewalt keineswegs in Frage gestellt wird, wenn zugleich die Schwächung der Opfer untersucht wird, die durch die Unerklärlichkeit hervorgerufen wurde, die von den Verfolgungsmaßnahmen, Massakern und der radikalen Aufkündigung sicherer Lebensgrundlagen ausging. „Nichts war mehr normal", fasst der Italiener Alberto Miele die erste Phase der Verfolgung zusammen (Mieli, 2015: 41), um bezüglich der darauffolgenden Verhafung hinzuzufügen: „Ich hatte Angst, ich wusste nicht, was auf mich zukommen würde, und ich verstand die Gründe nicht" (Mieli, 2015: 46). Eine permanente Steigerung des Unbegreiflichen führte schließlich zu einer Resignation, in der das Fragen selbst aufhörte:

> Ich sah, dass viele junge Leute den Gaskammern zugedacht waren, und es gelang mir wahrhaftig nicht, das zu verstehen. Als ich einen Kapo fragte, gab der mir

> einen Stoß und erinnerte mich an die Regel des Lagers: – Hier ist kein Warum. (Riccardi, 2009: 64–65) [Alle drei Übers. A.P.]

Primo Levi steht also in der autobiographischen Zeugnisliteratur keineswegs allein da. Die Frage nach dem „Warum" bildet die große Kontinuitätslinie zwischen den Genoziden selbst und ihrem „Danach", ja mehr noch: Auch auf Seiten derer, die zu den „Übriggebliebenen" gehörten, verstärkte sich die Unfähigkeit, das Geschehene zu begreifen, immer mehr. Es war also durchaus nicht nur so, dass die Unmöglichkeit des Begreifens auf den Moment der Katastrophe beschränkt war. Vielmehr zeigt sich an den Autobiographien überlebender Tutsi genauso wie an den Zeugnissen von Jüd:innen, die der Mordmaschine entkommen waren, dass die intellektuelle Blockade mit den Jahren eher zunahm. Es habe sie, so Ruth Klüger,

> der Gedanke gestreift, der heute leider bei mir noch tiefer sitzt als die Empörung über das große Verbrechen, nämlich das Bewusstsein der Absurdität des Ganzen, das Widersinnige daran, die völlige Sinnlosigkeit dieser Morde und Verschleppungen, die wir Endlösung, Holocaust, die jüdische Katastrophe und neuerdings die Shoah nennen, immer neue Namen, weil uns die Worte dafür sehr schnell im Munde faulen. Das Absurde, Unvernünftige daran, wie leicht es hätte verhindert werden können, wie doch niemand was davon gehabt hat, dass ich Schienen getragen hab, statt auf einer Schulbank zu sitzen, und die Rolle, die der Zufall dabei spielte. (Klüger, 1996: 148)

Für den Historiker Raul Hilberg war der Gedanke zentral, man könne die Mechanismen, die zur Shoah führten, nachzeichnen, doch ohne dass sich damit ein „Verstehen" im üblichen Sinne verbinden würde. Es ging ihm keineswegs um einen Verzicht auf historische Genauigkeit – nicht um eine forscherische Abdankung oder eine gar eine Unterlassung des Fragens. Das genaue Gegenteil war der Fall: Dass das „Warum" unbeantwortbar bleiben würde und umso unbeantwortbarer wurde, je genauer die Kenntnisse wurden, erwies sich als eigentlicher Antrieb, sich weiter mit der Geschichte der Massengewalt zu beschäftigen. Im Gespräch mit einem TAZ-Journalisten gab Hilberg denn auch das Folgende zu Protkoll:

> [Philipp Gessler] Herr Hilberg, wenn eine 20-jährige Deutsche fragt, warum die Juden umgebracht wurden: Was antworten Sie ihr? – [Raul Hilberg] Auf ein Warum kann ich nicht antworten, weil ich lebenslang nur erforschte, was geschah. Ich wollte wissen, wie etwas zustande kam: In welcher Reihenfolge Maßnahmen getroffen wurden, wer daran litt und umkam. Das war die Hauptsache: die Erhellung des Geschehens. – [Philipp Gessler] Aber Sie haben doch mehr Fakten gesammelt als alle anderen Schoah-Forscher: Auch Sie haben keine Antwort auf die Frage nach dem Warum? – [Raul Hilberg] So ist es, weil die Antwort immer komplizierter wird: Je mehr Fakten, desto mehr Antworten. Es wurden sehr viele

> Entscheidungen getroffen, es gab sehr viele Maßnahmen und Menschen, die darin verwickelt waren. All diese Motive müssen erfasst werden. Es sind so viele, sie sind so kompliziert, dass eine einfache Erklärung nicht passt. (Gessler, 2002: o. Seitenangabe)

Dass Hilberg nach 1994 zu den wenigen Historiker:innen gehört, die in einem Buch zur Shoah – nämlich seinem Hauptwerk „Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden" – eigens ein Kapitel über den „anderen Genozid", nämlich den Tutsizid, aufnahmen, ist kein Zufall.[5] Die Hoffnung, durch das Nicht-Verstehen bezüglich der Shoah ein intellektuelles Rüstzeug für präventive Maßnahmen gegen die Wiederholung von Ähnlichem zur Verfügung zu haben, hatte sich als Illusion erwiesen (Gessler, 2002: o. Seitenangabe). Entsprechend wurde Hilberg von Philipp Gessler mit einer weiteren Frage konfrontiert:

> Sie deuten in Ihrem Buch an, dass Sie Hoffnungslosigkeit prägt: Heißt das, dass Völkermorde nicht zu vermeiden sind? Dass wir aus der Schoah nichts gelernt haben? [Raul Hilberg] Wir haben es unlängst nicht in Ruanda vermieden. Jeder kann sich noch an diesen Völkermord erinnern. Man verdrängte ihn, man beachtete ihn nicht. Warum? Weil es in Afrika war. Warum beachtete man die Shoah nicht? Weil es Juden waren. (Gessler, 2002: o. Seitenangabe)

Diese – wenn man will paradoxe – Haltung, die forscht, um nicht zu verstehen, und das Nicht-Verstehen verstärkt, indem die Forschung weitergeht, dies aber begleitet von dem Gefühl, präventive Hoffnungen nicht erfüllen zu können, ist dann auch in didaktischer Hinsicht von Bedeutung. Was fängt man an mit Zeugnissen von Menschen, die, weil oder obwohl sie den Genozid erlebt hatten, ihre Realität nur mit Schwierigkeiten fassen konnten? Was geschieht, wenn die Wirklichkeit so phantastisch furchtbar wird, dass man sie mit Hilfe der Vorstellungskraft nicht mehr recht einholen kann? Ist es nicht vielleicht so, dass die UNO so langsam reagierte, weil ihre Vertreter:innen sich die ganze Bandbreite an Möglichkeiten – vor allen Dingen Tempi – der Tötungen nicht vorstellen konnten? Derselbe Alberto Mieli, der schon eben zu Wort kam, stellt in Bezug auf die Zeit der Verfolgung, die er selbst erlebte, fest:

> Irgendwann hörst du dann auf, unter diesen Bedingungen noch Fragen zu stellen, und du beschäftigst dich einzig damit, zu überleben. Du akzeptierst alles wie eine Regel, und diese Haltung tritt ein, wenn man dir alles genommen hat, auch die

[5] Ein weiterer Historiker, der auf diese Weise argumentiert: "Die Entdeckung des Völkermords bestärkte mich in meiner Überzeugung, dass das „Nie wieder", auf dem der moralische und politische Pakt der westlichen Gesellschaften beruht, nichts weiter ist als eine Maske, eine rein beschwörende Formel." (Audoin-Rouezau, 2017: 17.)

> Würde. Man darf nie aufhören, zu fragen, zu versuchen, zu verstehen. (Mieli, 2015: 55) [Übers. A.P.]

Der Sprung von der Lakonie, mit der festgehalten wird, dass das Fragen aufgehört hatte, hin zur emphatischen Forderung, es dürfe nie aufhören, ist so groß wie kultur- und zeitübergreifend gültig. Die heute in Düsseldorf als Psychotherapeutin für traumatisierte Flüchtlinge arbeitende Esther Mujwayo, eine Überlebende des Tutsizids, postuliert:

> Wenn der Überlebende regelmäßig den Eindruck hat, dass man ihm nicht glaubt, hat das damit zu tun, dass die Leute, die ihm gegenübersitzen, häufig Lust haben, sich einzureden, dass die Situation so schrecklich nicht gewesen sei. Doch schrecklich war's. Schrecklich in solchem Ausmaß, dass man sich selbst, als Überlebender, sagt: Ist das denn wirklich passiert? Hat jemand das wirklich tun können? Dabei weiß ich ja genau, dass das passiert ist, doch es ist, als wollte ich's nicht glauben, es ist zu unvorstellbar. (Mujawayo, 2011: 95) [Übers. A.P.]

Zusammenfassend lassen sich mithin drei Phasen unterscheiden. Die erste ist bestimmt durch ein Nicht-Verstehen, das tendenziell mit einer Verharmlosung der heraufziehenden Gefahr einherging. Die zweite, die sich zum Teil schrittweise, zum Teil mit plötzlichen Beschleunigungen ergab, lief auf die Anerkennung und das Verstehen von etwas einher, was ich anderswo als „absolute Gerechtigkeit" zu beschreiben versucht habe (Peiter, 2019). Gemeint ist, dass „Gerechtigkeit" und „Verstehen" dann absolut werden, wenn die von der Gewalt Betroffenen noch nicht einmal mehr artikulieren können, dass zutiefst, im extremsten Sinne ungerecht, nicht rechtfertigbar, d.h. nicht verstehbar ist, was ihnen widerfährt. Die SS ist – so möchte ich provozierend den paradoxen Ansatz beschreiben – so eine Instanz der „absoluten Gerechtigkeit" und damit auch der „absoluten Antwortlosigkeit", wie Levi sie beschrieb. Die dritte Phase schließlich entspricht dem, was Mujawayo darzustellen versucht: Die Überlebenden verstehen, doch zugleich verstehen sie auch nicht. Doch wenn sie dies zum Ausdruck bringen, ist es fast, als würden sie negationistische Thesen stützen, nämlich indem sie zugeben, auch sie hätten mitunter – darin ihren Zuhörer:innen ähnlich – das Gefühl, die Vergangenheit sei irreal, es könne die Verbrechen, die ihnen widerfahren waren, gar nicht gegeben haben. Eine Form von einer kollektiv geteilten „Dissoziation" tritt ein, und diese wird dann auch zum Problem für die Didaktik. Es droht nämlich die Gefahr, dass die Ungläubigkeit der Opfer als Einladung missverstanden wird, „es" auch als „Nachgeborener" nicht glauben zu wollen. Mit einer Formulierung von Günther Anders könnte man sagen, das didaktische Problem bestehe darin, dass nicht nur „Unterschwelliges" vom Tisch der Beschäftigung mit Geschichte geräumt wird,

sondern genauso gut „Überschwelliges", das Lerner:innen (wie Lehrende) intellektuell wie emotional überfordert (Anders, 1972: 97).

Fallbeispiele: Das „Verstehen" der Säuglinge

Es soll nun zwecks „praktischer Anwendung" eine einzige Selbstbeschreibung zitiert werden, die von einem Täter stammt und das didaktische Dilemma verdeutlicht, das das Autotelische, gleichsam Redundante eines Tuns beinhaltet, das nur darum „weiterzumachen" schien, weil das Töten nun einmal begonnen worden war. Vorauszuschicken ist den Sätzen dieses inhaftierten Hutu, dass in Ruanda mit ausgesuchter Grausamkeit und unter bewusster Verlängerung der Qualen der Opfer getötet zu werden pflegte (Nahoum-Grappe, 2002: 601–609). Amputationen von Gliedmaßen wurden zu einer massenhaften Tötungspraxis, doch diese Tötung sollte Zeit in Anspruch nehmen – nicht nur Minuten, sondern Stunden, nicht nur Stunden, sondern oft auch Tage. Für die Unterrichtspraxis stellen Aussagen wie die gleich folgende eine große Herausforderung dar, denn sie führen an die Grenze des Aushaltbaren. Mehr noch: Sie drohen, wenn sie im Unterricht thematisiert werden, Schüler:innen dem Risiko einer sekundären Traumatisierung auszusetzen. Mit dem Problem des „Verstehens" ist also immer auch das Problem verbunden, wie genau – ob nun mit „Schock"-Materialien oder suchend nach einer Form von „Zurückhaltung" – man überhaupt vorgeht. Das besagte Zitat lautet (und ich zitiere, um auch in sprachlicher Hinsicht eine genaue Idee zu vermitteln, sowohl das Original als auch seine Übersetzung):

> Sauver les nourrissons, ce n'était pas praticable. Ils étaient abattus contre les murs et les arbres ou ils étaient coupés directement. Mais ils étaient tués plus rapidement, rapport à leur petite taille et parce que leur souffrance n'était d'aucune utilité. On a dit qu'à l'église de Nyamata, on a brûlé des enfants dans l'essence, c'était peut-être vrai, mais c'était le petit nombre dans un brouhaha de premier jour. Par après il n'a pas duré. En tout cas je n'ai plus [sic!] rien remarqué. Les nourrissons ne pouvaient rien comprendre du pourquoi des souffrances, ça ne valait pas de s'attarder sur eux. (Hatzfeld, 2003: 149)

> Neugeborene zu retten, war nicht umsetzbar. Sie wurden an den Mauern oder den Bäumen zerschmettert oder sie wurden direkt zerhackt. Doch sie wurden schneller getötet, wegen ihrer kleinen Körpergröße und *weil ihr Leiden ohne jeden Nutzen war*. Man sagt, dass in der Kirche von Nyamata Kinder in Benzin verbrannt wurden, und das war vielleicht wahr, aber das war eine kleine Zahl im gewaltigen Getöse des ersten Tages. Später hat das nicht angehalten. Auf jeden Fall habe ich nichts mehr [sic!] bemerkt. *Die Säuglinge konnten vom Warum des Leidens nichts verstehen, es hatte keinen Wert, sich mit ihnen aufzuhalten*. [Übers. und Hervorhebungen A.P.]

Es ist der letzte Satz, der als Mikro-Material für die Entwicklung von didaktischen Überlegungen genutzt werden könnte. Offenbar unterscheidet der Täter zwischen zwei Kategorien von Opfern: zwischen denjenigen, die, bedingt durch ihr Alter, nicht nur leiden, sondern auch dazu in der Lage sind, zu verstehen, dass sie leiden *sollen*. Eine Potenzierung also der Grausamkeit, die nicht nur auf das „Ergebnis" der Vernichtungspolitik – also den Tod – zielt, sondern in perversester Form dem Motto huldigt, der „Weg sei das Ziel".

Der Philosoph und Kunsthistoriker Didi-Hubermann hat in einem kürzlich erschienenen Buch über Victor Klemperer die Idee einer mörderischen Ausschaltung jeder Gefühlsnuance auf Seiten der Mörder plausibel zu machen versucht (Didi-Hubermann, 2022): Eine Vereindeutigung und die Ausschaltung aller emotionalen Wider- und Einsprüche sei auf Seiten der nationalsozialistischen Schergen am Werk gewesen und habe so die Gefühllosigkeit – eine Art „affektiver Tyrannie" – mit hervorgebracht, von der auch Hannah Arendt spricht. Für Arendt erklärt sich die totale Mitleidlosigkeit aus einer Form von Umkehr des Gefühls, hin zu sich selbst. Statt zuzugeben, wie schrecklich es ist, dass ein Neugeborenes nicht nur leidet, sondern, mehr noch, bewusst zum Leiden *gebracht* wird, erklären die Täter *sich selbst* zu Opfern, und zwar mit dem Gestus, schrecklich sei allein, dass sie selbst ein Neugeborenes zu töten hätten, ohne ihrem Gefühl des Mitleids nachgeben zu „dürfen".

> [D]as Problem war nicht so sehr, wie man mit ihrem „normalen Gewissen" [also dem Gewissen der Täter; A.P.] fertigwerden könne als wie man sie von den Reaktionen eines gleichsam animalischen „Mitleids" befreien konnte, das normale Menschen beim Anblick physischer Leiden nahezu unwillkürlich überfällt. […] Der […] Trick war sehr einfach und durchaus wirksam; er bestand darin, dies Mitleid im Entstehen umzukehren und statt auf andere auf sich selbst zu richten. So dass die Mörder, wenn <sic!> immer sie die Schrecklichkeit ihrer Taten überfiel, nicht mehr sagen: Was tue ich bloß!, sondern: Wie muss ich nur leiden bei der Erfüllung meiner schrecklichen Pflichten, wie schwer lastet die Aufgabe auf meinen Schultern! (Arendt, 2001: 204–205)

Das Irritierende der obigen Innenperspektive des Täters besteht darin, dass ganz kühl abgeschätzt zu werden scheint, welches Opfer zum „Verstehen" in der Lage sei, und welches nicht. Es geht also keineswegs darum, Säuglinge als die Wehrlosesten *schnell* zu töten, damit wenigstens sie „nur kurz" leiden. Vielmehr geht der Täter davon aus, dass er selbst das Verstehen der Opfer erfahren können wollte, dasselbe aber von Seiten der Säuglinge nicht zu erwarten war. Je kleiner der Körper, desto größer die „Tödbarkeit", desto geringer wiederum die Fähigkeit zum „Verstehen". Fast scheint es, als würde der Mord gerechtfertigt durch eine

Haltung der Opfer, die besagte, in der Tat, sie hätten keine weiteren Fragen, in der Tat verstehe man: „Hier ist kein Warum". Das wäre erneut der Punkt, den ich als „absolute Gerechtigkeit" bezeichnet habe. Wo sogar die Opfer „verstehen", weil sämtliche Körper- und Zivilisationsschranken eingerissen worden sind, sind die Entmenschlichung und Animalisierung auf ihrem Höhepunkt angekommen (zur Rolle, die darin Invektiven spielten: Peiter, 2023c).

Die Geschichte von zwei Kindern, die, so Esther Mujawayo, von den Mördern verschont geblieben waren, weil sie diese mit ihren Beteuerungen, sie würden wirklich nicht das Gleiche tun wie ihre Eltern, *belustigt* hatten, erweitert die Perspektive auf das Verhältnis von Frage und Antwort (Mujawayo, 2011). Diese Kinder versuchten, sich sozusagen eine Antwort zurechtzulegen, um zu verstehen, warum die Hutu dabei waren, die Erwachsenen zu töten. Tutsi zu sein, wurde zu etwas, was man „machte", war nicht länger etwas, was man *qua* Geburt je schon „war". Und weil man Dinge, die man macht, genauso gut auch *nicht* machen kann, brauchte man den Männern mit ihren Tötungswerkzeugen nur zu versichern, man selbst werde von nun an nichts mehr „machen" – und schon schien der Grund für die Vernichtung aufgehoben zu sein.

Dass nun diese Kinder dem Genozid entgangen sind, scheint mit diesem Streben der Täter nach „Verstehen" zu tun zu haben. Die beiden Kinder hatten sich ganz offensichtlich um das „Verstehen" bemüht. Doch ihre „Unfähigkeit", zu erkennen, dass es das bloße „Tutsi-Sein" war, das als Tötungsgrund ausreichte, ließ sie auf die Stufe von Säuglingen herabsinken, von denen kein „Verstehen" erwartet wurde (Zum Zusammenhang der „Komik" des Missverstehens: Peiter, 2007a u. b).

Das „Amüsement" der Täter kam daher, dass sie die Kinder für „fähiger" gehalten hatten. Die Diskrepanz zwischen der Intention, sie hin zum Verstehen zu töten, und der kindlichen Reaktion, die auf ein Festhalten an einstigen Verstehenskategorien hinauslief, führte dazu, dass die Täter die Kinder keineswegs „begnadigten", sie aber wenigstens „für jetzt", vorerst also, „laufen ließen", stets jedoch in der Erwartung, sterben würden sie „sowieso" (Peiter, 2019). Das erste „So" der gegebenen Situation war eines, in dem das Verstehen durch die Qual hätte erreicht werden sollen. Das zweite „So" würde das „So" anderer Täter sein, die den momentanen Verzicht aufs Töten wieder „wettmachen" und die Kinder an ihr Tutsi-„Sein" und die Bedeutungslosigkeit eines jeden „Machens" erinnern würden.

Die Säuglinge wiederum waren dem „Sowieso" insofern ausgesetzt, als man sie natürlich auch leiden lassen konnte – leiden, ohne den „Gewinn" des „Verstehens" „einzufahren". Aber man konnte sie auch schnell töten, als Verzichtleistung der

Täter gleichsam, doch zugleich mit demselben Ergebnis, nämlich: dem Tod. Dass auf Seiten der Zuhörer – hier Hatzfelds und seiner Leserschaft – eine Verstehens-Grenze erreicht ist, erklärt sich aus der Ungeheuerlichkeit, dass dem Täter nicht einmal vorstellbar ist, wie seine Darstellung der Ermordung der Jüngsten und Allerjüngsten auf *andere* wirken könnte. Er bleibt der genozidalen Logik voll verhaftet, kein Bemühen um Distanz ist zu erkennen – seine Fixierung auf das „Verstehen" der Opfer ist offensichtlich intakt. Derjenige, der im Gefängnis das Interview führt, vermag noch nicht einmal in Ansätzen als „korrigierende Instanz" zu wirken. Der Täter bleibt in seinem Kosmos befangen, er spricht so hemmungslos, wie er zuvor getötet hatte.

Didaktische Schlussfolgerungen

Und so bleibt denn in didaktischer Hinsicht die uneingelöste Frage, wie man sich selbst positioniert im Kontakt zu einem Begriff von Verstehen, dem man sein Verständnis verweigern muss. Ein Ansatz im Schulunterricht könnte darin bestehen, das scheinbar Unbegreifliche aus einer Perspektive zu betrachten, die sowohl mit der allumfassenden Stoßrichtung genozidaler Gewalt zu tun hat, als auch mit einem Charakteristikum, das die extreme Grausamkeit der Täter:innen erklärt (Brandstetter, 2001). Auch wenn die Shoah stärker als der Genozid an den Tutsi Ruandas, der sich vor aller Augen, nämlich auf offener Straße, ja sogar „unter Vorzeigung der geleisteten Arbeit" vor den anderen vollzog, auf Geheimhaltung zielte, gilt, dass auch in den nationalsozialistischen Lagern die Herabwürdigung der Opfer zum Alltag gehörte. Die Frage nach dem Warum führt, so der Historiker Audoin-Rouzeau (2017), hin zur Zerstörung von Herkunft. Mit Blick auf Ruanda sei zu postulieren, dass dieses „unveränderliche Element der Bestimmung unseres Menschseins" beseitigt werden sollte.

> So erklärt sich, warum in Ruanda bestimmte Dinge so oft zwischen Nachbarn passiert sind: die Häufigkeit von Angriffen auf die Fortpflanzungsorgane, das Töten von Kindern *vor den Augen* der Eltern, von Eltern *vor den Augen* ihrer Kinder, die systematische Vergewaltigung von Frauen, bevorzugt *vor den Augen* ihrer Angehörigen, und manchmal auch *mit Hilfe* ihrer Angehörigen. (Audoin-Rouzeau, 2017: 103) [Übers. A.P.]

Der Versuch, durch vergleichende Perspektiven, z.B. auf Shoah und den Genozid an den Tutsi – warum nicht aber auch unter Einbeziehung anderer Genozide –, die Regelmäßigkeit und Wiederkehr bestimmter Mechanismen der totalen Herabwürdigung zu verstehen, könnte insofern einen Ansatz bieten, die Traumatisierung der Lernenden nicht total werden zu lassen, weil damit auch die

Frage nach Handlungsmöglichkeiten stimuliert wird. Geschichtliches Lernen wird „praktisch", lädt ein zum Nachdenken über mögliche Zukünfte. Es beschränkt sich nicht allein auf die Rekonstruktion dessen, was war, sondern versucht, einen Rahmen von Denkbarem, Möglichen – nämlich dem weiterhin drohenden „Undenkbarsten" – abzustecken. Um es erneut mit Hilberg zu sagen: „Alles ist möglich".

Das heißt, dass mit der Erfahrung des Extremsten die Notwendigkeit von außerordentlichen Maßnahmen diskutiert werden kann. Vom zu langsamem Verstehen der internationalen Organisationen leitet man zurück zur Notwendigkeit, die Verbrechen mitsamt dem Nicht-Verstehen der damaligen Akteure zu verstehen (Lanzmann, 1985). Es wird der naiven Rede ein Riegel vorgeschoben, „wie eigentlich so etwas *noch* habe geschehen können", weil sich das „noch" durch die Realität der Wiederholungen und unangemessenen Reaktionen als widerlegt betrachten muss. „Natürlich" bleibt „es" möglich, „natürlich" gibt es keinen einsträngigen geschichtlichen Weg „nach oben", zum immer „Besseren", weg von der Gewalt. Dass vielmehr Genozide spezifisch moderne Phänomene sind, dürfte ein wichtiges Lernelement sein. In Bezug auf die „Begründungen", die man dann doch für die Verbrechen analysieren kann, bedeutet das den Einstieg in einen abstoßenden, fremden Kosmos, der aber eigenen Motiven folgt, d.h. durchaus irgendwie „nachvollzogen" werden kann:

> Mit dem, was man dem Anderen antat, bewies man ihm und zugleich sich selbst, dass er entschieden der Feind war. Diese Grausamkeit, die beim Mord an den Nachbarn 1994 allgegenwärtig war, ist keine Art „Nebenprodukt" der Frage nach dem Völkermord. Sie ist vielmehr ihr Kern – eine Gewalt, die zu ihrem eigenen Zweck geworden war und zuallererst Schmerz erzeugen wollte, so viel Schmerz wie möglich. Den körperlichen Schmerz, aber auch den Schmerz der Seele, der bis heute in allen Überlebenden weiterlebt. Dieser Schmerz ist symbolisch: Denn die Grausamkeit zielt auf Schändung, sie will das Heilige des Lebens des Opfers zu zerstören und zerstört es dann auch tatsächlich. Darüber hinaus zielt die Grausamkeit auf die Familie des Opfers und, noch darüber hinausgehend, auf seine gesamte Gemeinschaft. (Audoin-Rouzeau, 2017: 102–103) [Übers. A.P.]

Audoin-Rouzeau geht so weit, den Tutsizid durch eine Reaktion auf schwindende Differenzen zu erklären:

> [E]s kann sein, dass die Gewalt der Nachbarn ihre Wurzeln nicht in der Unähnlichkeit, in der Distanz, in der Andersartigkeit hat, sondern ganz im Gegenteil in der Ähnlichkeit, in der Nähe, in der Identität. [...] Die Antwort auf das Rätsel von 1994 läge dann in der Nähe – der extremen Nähe. Wagen wir ruhig, es

> auszusprechen: nicht in der unbedeutend kleinen Differenz, sondern in der *gar nicht vorhandenen* Differenz. (Audoin-Rouzeau, 2017: 105) [Übers. A.P.]

Auf ähnliche Weise argumentiert Harald Welzer,

> dass die Grenzlinie zwischen den Tutsi und den Hutu de facto durch die Mobilität zwischen den Gruppen unscharf war – die extreme Tötungsgewalt hat auch hier die Funktion, die Gruppengrenzen eindeutig zu markieren, und damit strukturiert sie Wirklichkeit. Vernichtungs- und Tötungsgewalt scheint regelmäßig desto radikaler zu werden und einer Totalisierung zuzustreben, wenn die Grenze zwischen Wir- und Sie-Gruppe nicht völlig klar ist. Hier kommt der konstruktivistische Charakter extremer Gewalt einmal mehr zum Ausdruck. […] [S]chließlich konnten sich die Mörder der Selbstverständlichkeit, Sinnhaftigkeit und Normalität ihres Handelns daran versichern, dass alle anderen auch taten, was sie selbst taten. (Welzer, 2016: 234–235)

Dass in der Tat Menschen, die den Täter:innen bestens bekannt waren, plötzlich als Fremde erschienen, d.h. dass sich der Wunsch, man möge sie klar von sich scheiden können, erfüllte, zeigte sich nicht nur in der langen, ideologischen Vorbereitung auf die Mordtätigkeit (Miles, 2000: 107–115), sondern auch *in* ihr. Damit meine ich: Indem man Menschen in Latrinen stieß und dort ertränkte, indem man Babys behandelte, als seien sie gefährliche Spione, indem man Frauen zu Sexual-Objekten machte, wie man es an den eigenen Frauen nie gewagt hätte, führte man gleichsam den Beweis für die „Richtigkeit" der These, wie „anders", nicht mehr „menschlich", sondern rein hassenswert die Opfer waren. Weil niemand wollen konnte, dass ein total entwürdigter, beschmutzter – z.B. durch besagte Latrinen beschmutzter – Mensch wieder zur Erdoberfläche hervorkam, enthielt das Verbrechen eine Art von „Logik", mit der sich die Täter selbst vorführten, dass die „Behandlung" der Unerwünschten nur diese sein konnte und keine andere.

Pio Mutungirehe, einer der von Jean Hatzfeld befragten Männer hat denn auch zu Protokoll gegeben, dass er sich im Moment des Mordens nicht mehr dazu in der Lage fühlte, den – ihm nahen, zutiefst vertrauten – Nachbarn *wiederzuerkennen*. Das Verbrechen hatte, noch ehe es begangen worden war, seine Wirkung gezeigt.

> Seine [nämlich des Nachbarn; A.P.] Züge ähnelten denen der Person, die ich kannte, doch nichts erinnerte mich verbindlich daran, dass ich mit ihr von jeher Umgang hatte. Ich weiß nicht, ob sie mich verstehen können. Es war eine Wiederkennung [Anerkennung?] ohne das Kennen.[6] Es war das erste Opfer, das ich tötete, meine Sichtweise und meine Gedanken waren in Unordnung geraten.

[6] Bigott übersetzt: „Es war ein Wiedererkennen, ohne ihn zu erkennen." (Hatzfeld, 2004: 28).

(Hatzfeld, 2003: 28) [Übers. A.P.]

Weil also die Täter:innen eigenständig die Differenz herstellten, die nötig war, um die „rechte Tötungsenergie" und den „überzeugenden Motiv-Rahmen" zu schaffen, bleibt dem schulischen Geschichtsunterricht nichts anderes übrig, als sich stets auf dieser Grenze zwischen Verstehen und Nicht-Verstehen, dem lockenden, unvermeidlichen „Warum?" und der nüchternen Beschränkung auf die sachliche Rekonstruktion des Geschehens – à la Hilberg also – zu bewegen. Wenn es den Lehrenden gelingt, diese Position mit Hilfe geeigneter Materialien plausibel zu machen, bleibt vielleicht doch noch ein wenig Hoffnung, dass die Frage, warum das „noch immer" möglich sei, zum Realistischen hingebogen wird und die Antwort erfolgt: „Ja, es bleibt möglich. Und darum müssen wir verstehen, ohne zu verstehen."[7]

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[7] Und darum soll dieser Vorschlag auch keineswegs als Relativierung der Shoah betrachtet werden. Im Kontext des „zweiten Historikerstreits" teile ich die Sensibilitäten, die formuliert worden sind in: Friedländer 2022. Das Konzept der Multidirektionalität muss also mit Vorsicht behandelt werden. (Rothberg, 2021).

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Mediation in der translationsorientierten Sprachlehre

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the concept of mediation in the area of Translation- and Interpreting-oriented Language Learning and Teaching (TILLT). The latter has only recently established itself as a sub-field of Applied Translation Studies. In the TILLT classroom, students receive tailor-suited language education in order to be fully prepared for the actual translation and/or interpreting classroom. Within Translation Studies, mediation has been a highly contested concept, in particular since its strong promotion in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – Companion Volume (CEFRCV). Therefore, the paper discusses how to include mediation activities and strategies in TILLT without underestimating translation and interpreting professionals' unique skills set and ethical positioning.

KEYWORDS: *mediation, translation-oriented language education, higher education pedagogy, translation and interpreting studies*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Beitrag wirft einen kritischen Blick auf das Konzept der Mediation. Der Begleitband des Gemeinsamen europäischen Referenzrahmens für Sprachen propagiert Mediation in besonderem Maße und gibt in seiner deutschen Übersetzung die zuvor verwendete Bezeichnung der Sprachmittlung für mediierende Aktivitäten auf. Besonderes Augenmerk legt der Beitrag auf die Rolle von Mediation in der translationsorientierten Sprachlehre, die seit einigen Jahren unter dem Akronym TILLT (Translation- and Interpreting-oriented Language Learning and Teaching) erforscht wird. Gerade im Rahmen der Sprachausbildung angehender Übersetzer:innen und Dolmetscher:innen, welche den Grundstein für darauf aufbauenden Übersetzungs- und Dolmetschunterricht bildet, scheint es unumgänglich, sich kritisch mit Mediationsaktivitäten und -strategien auseinanderzusetzen.

SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER: *Mediation, translationsorientierte Sprachlehre, Hochschuldidaktik, Übersetzungs- und Dolmetschwissenschaft*

Einleitung

Wie kaum ein anderes bildungspolitisches Instrument des Europarats kann das Dokument mit dem Titel „Gemeinsamer europäischer Referenzrahmen für Sprachen: lernen, lehren, beurteilen“ (GeR) auf eine beispiellose Erfolgsgeschichte verweisen. Seit dieses Auftragswerk des Europarats im Jahr 2001 zeitgleich in englischer Originalfassung (Council of Europe, 2001) und in deutscher Übersetzung (Europarat, 2001) erschienen ist, hat es einen starken, nachhaltigen Einfluss auf das Lernen, Lehren, Prüfen und Testen von Fremdsprachen ausgeübt – und dies nicht nur in Europa, sondern weltweit. Das hier im Fokus stehende Konzept der Mediation wurde zwar bereits in der ersten Ausgabe des GeR (2001) berücksichtigt, allerdings noch ohne empirisch validierte Skalen und Deskriptoren für Mediation bzw. für Sprachmittlung. In der deutschen Fassung der Erstausgabe (2001) wurde durchgängig die Bezeichnung Sprachmittlung verwendet, was im Jahr 2020 in der deutschen Übersetzung des 2018 auf Englisch erschienenen Begleitbands „Companion Volume with New Descriptors“ (Council of Europe, 2018) zugunsten der Bezeichnung Mediation aufgegeben wurde.

Dem GeR-Begleitband (2018/2020) liegt ein erweiterter Mediationsbegriff zugrunde, der einen umfassenden pädagogischen Ansatz verfolgt, indem sprachliche, pragmatische und plurikulturelle Kompetenzen mit psychosozialen und emotionalen Aspekten von Kommunikation vereint werden. So wird etwa Empathie und der Fähigkeit zu einem Perspektivwechsel größere Bedeutung zugeschrieben als noch in der Erstausgabe des GeR. Abbildung 1 stellt eine Ergänzung zur meistzitierten und folglich bekanntesten Darstellung der im GeR-Begleitband vorgeschlagenen Aufteilung in Mediationsaktivitäten und -strategien dar. Rudi Camerer, einer der Übersetzer der deutschen Ausgabe des Begleitbands, verdeutlicht darin zwei Konstrukte von Mediation, d. h. kognitive und beziehungsrelevante Mediation. Die Erweiterung des Mediationsbegriffs im GeR-Begleitband wird nicht zuletzt dadurch verdeutlicht, dass die linke Seite von Abbildung 1 visualisiert, welch engen Fokus die in der Erstfassung des GeR (2001) favorisierte Bezeichnung Sprachmittlung hatte.

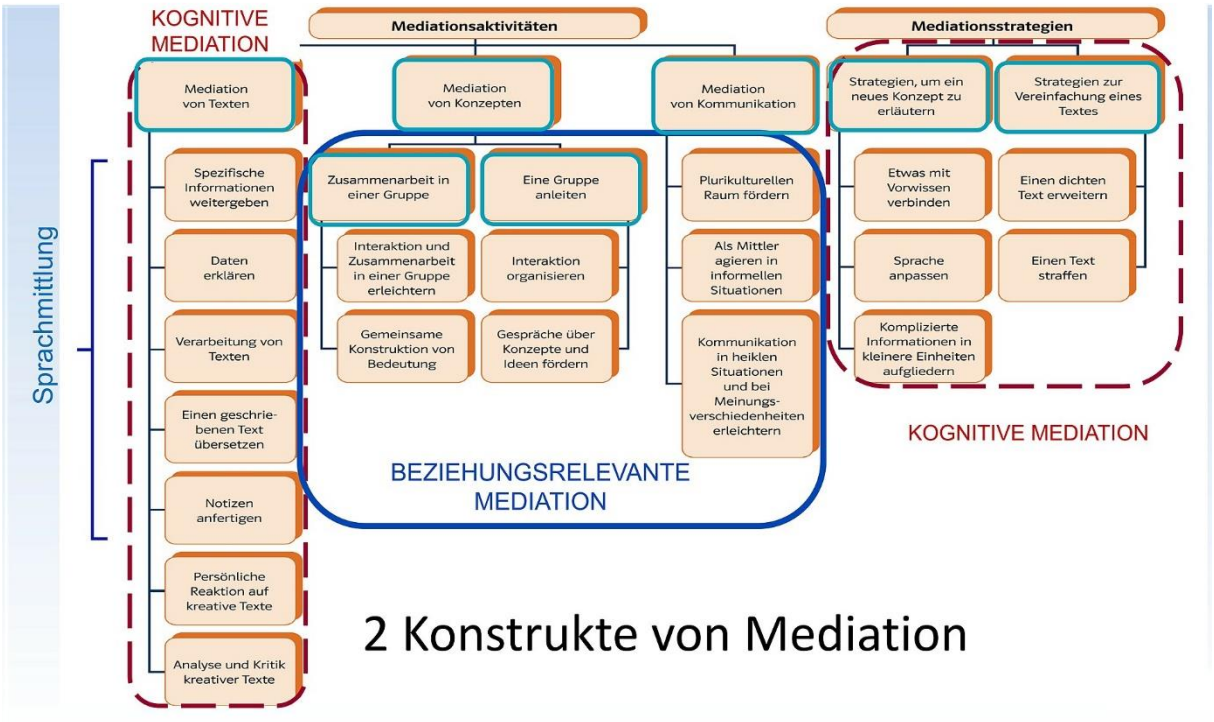

Abb. 1: Kognitive und beziehungsrelevante Mediation, Ergänzung zu Mediationsaktivitäten und -strategien (Europarat, 2020, 112), mit freundlicher Genehmigung von Rudi Camerer[1]

Der starke Fokus auf Mediation im GeR-Begleitband wird unter anderem damit begründet, dass „in today's digitally dependent and globally interdependent world" (Dendrinos, 2024a: XIV). Globalisierung, Digitalisierung, Migration und zunehmend mehrsprachige private, berufliche und gesellschaftliche Kontexte als neue Normalität gelten. In einer von Mehrsprachigkeit geprägten Welt finden Prozesse der Verständigung, des Sich-Verständlich-Machens und der Verständnissicherung nicht nur in Bildungskontexten, sondern auch in alltagsweltlichen Lebensbezügen statt. Demgemäß ist Piccardo (2024: 30) zufolge Mediation „at the centre of understanding, thinking, meaning-making, collaborating – acting as a social agent". Diese zentrale Rolle von Mediation in Alltag, Bildung, Arbeit und Gesellschaft spiegelt sich im GeR-Begleitband dadurch wider, dass die zuvor verwendete Einteilung in vier Sprachfertigkeiten aufgegeben wird. Anstatt eine Gliederung in Hören und Lesen als rezeptive Fertigkeiten sowie

[1] Das Schaubild ist hier abrufbar: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Begleitband_zum_Gemeinsamen_europ%C3%A4ischen_Referenzrahmen_f%C3%BCr_Sprachen

in Sprechen und Schreiben als produktive Fertigkeiten vorzunehmen, geht der GeR-Begleitband von vier Kommunikationsmodi aus. Diese lauten Rezeption, Produktion, Interaktion und Mediation, wobei sich die traditionelle Einteilung in vier Sprachfertigkeiten in den Kommunikationsmodi Rezeption und Produktion wiederfindet. Abbildung 2 veranschaulicht die integrative Bedeutung von Mediation als Bindeglied zwischen Rezeption, Produktion und Interaktion. Sie macht dies deutlicher als das häufig abgebildete Modell der Beziehungen zwischen den Kommunikationsmodi im GeR-Begleitband (2020: 40). Hier zeigen nämlich die erforderlichen Kompetenzen (linguistische, pragmatische, soziolinguistische, plurilinguale und -kulturelle sowie digitale) die Komplexität der Zusammenhänge bei der gemeinsamen Bedeutungskonstruktion.

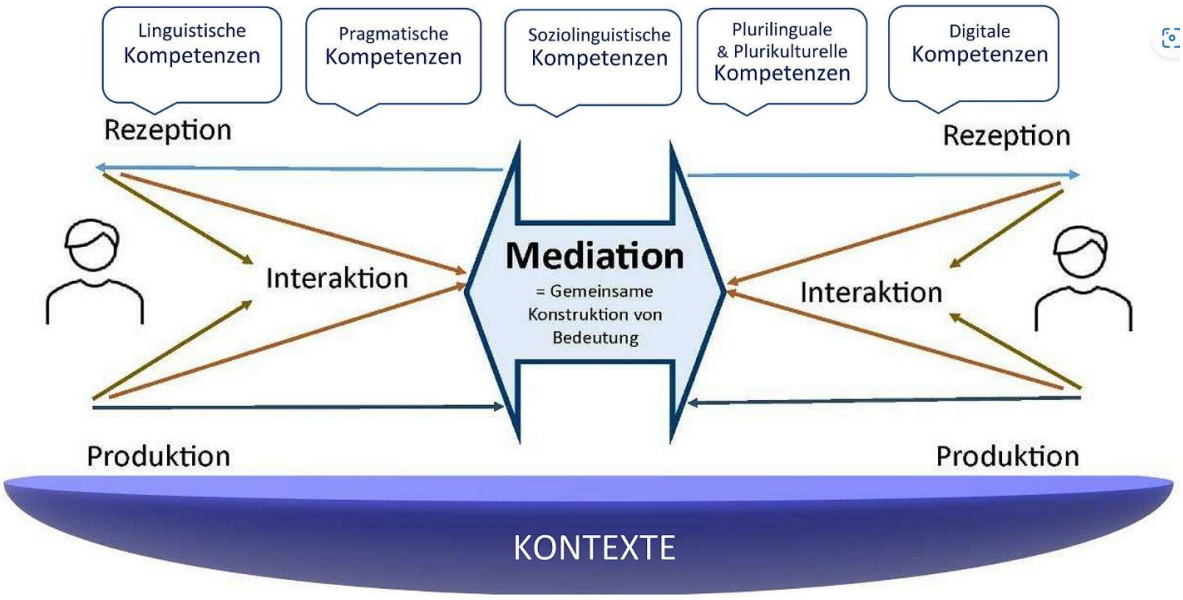

Abb. 2: Mediation als gemeinsame Konstruktion von Bedeutung, mit freundlicher Genehmigung von Rudi Camerer[2]

Im Folgenden geht es darum, zu erörtern, welche Konsequenzen sich aus der neuen Ausrichtung des GeR-Begleitbands auf die hochschulische Sprachlehre (Abschnitt 2) und im Speziellen auf die Sprachlehre im Rahmen der Translationsausbildung (Abschnitt 3) ergeben.

[2] Das Schaubild ist hier abrufbar: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Begleitband_zum_Gemeinsamen_europ%C3%A4ischen_Referenzrahmen_f%C3%BCr_Sprachen

Mediation in der hochschulischen Sprachlehre

Dendrinos (2024b: 5) verdeutlicht das dem GeR-Begleitband innewohnende transformative Potenzial, wenn sie schreibt, dass „the inclusion of mediation […] has challenged the monolingual, monocultural and monomodal paradigm of foreign language education". Nicht zuletzt aus diesem Grund propagiert der GeR-Begleitband die Entwicklung bzw. Stärkung von plurilingualen und plurikulturellen Kompetenzen, gekoppelt mit digitalen Kompetenzen in Online-Interaktionen, die als multimodales Phänomen bezeichnet werden (Europarat, 2020: 104). Mehrsprachige Gesellschaften als Norm statt als Ausnahme bezeichnend, setzt der GeR-Begleitband ein starkes Zeichen gegen „the cultivated monolingual ethos of communication, imagined monolingual societies" (Dendrinos, 2024b: 12), aber auch gegen Native-Speakerism, Linguizismus oder „Standard Language ideologies that incite the eradication of the linguistic variation that exists in all societies" (Dendrinos, 2024b: 12). Für die Hochschullehre mit ihrem Anspruch, Entscheidungsträger:innen der Zukunft auszubilden, ist in diesem Zusammenhang eine Aussage Piccardos (2024) von besonderer Bedeutung. „The social agent mediates while languaging because languaging is the manifestation of mediation" (Piccardo, 2024: 42). Sie beschreibt das Einnehmen einer handlungsorientierten, mediationalen Perspektive auf Sprache als Möglichkeit, weg vom Nomen „language" hin zum Verb „languaging" zu gelangen.

> The move from thinking of a language in terms of 'product', something that can be learned more or less formally, to conceptualizing it as a 'process' in which individuals engage both when they use it and when they learn it, explains a semantic shift from language as a countable noun to language as a verb, from language(s) to languaging. (Piccardo, 2024: 40)

Im GeR-Begleitband heißt es dazu, dass wir Sprache nicht nur verwenden, um anderen eine Botschaft zu übermitteln, sondern vor allem auch dazu, selbst einen Gedanken zu entwickeln. Etwas gedanklich in Worte zu fassen und somit Gedanken zu artikulieren, wird im GeR-Begleitband als „languaging"[3] beschrieben (Europarat, 2020: 42). Hochschulische Sprachlehre lebt davon, dass sich Lehrende und Lernende mit Sprache über Sprache austauschen. Arras und Schuhmann (2024a: 115) halten fest, dass Mediation als genuiner Bestandteil von Lehren und Lernen zu verstehen ist. Institutionalisiertes Lehren ist zielgruppenadäquate Wissensaufbereitung und institutionalisiertes Lernen erfordert die hauptsächlich textbasierte kognitive Verarbeitung von Informationen (Arras und Schuhmann, 2024a: 115). In plurilingualen und plurikulturellen Lernkontexten, wie

[3] Fraglich ist freilich, wie „languaging" auf Deutsch bezeichnet werden soll. Als Sprachgebrauch, Sprachverwendung, Versprachlichung oder als Verb „spracheln" im Kontrast zu „sprechen"?

Sprachkurse an universitären Sprachenzentren sie darstellen, sind kognitive Mediationsstrategien, wie in Abbildung 1 dargestellt, von eminenter Bedeutung. Strategien zur Vereinfachung eines gehörten oder gelesenen Textes sind beispielsweise das Mitschreiben oder Exzerpieren, wie Arras (2022) ausführt. Versteht man „languaging" als Gedankenartikulation und als Manifestation von Mediation, so sind die von Arras (2022: 230) für den Hochschulkontext beschriebenen „wissenstransmittierenden Handlungen Mitschreiben und Exzerpieren" als Mediation für das eigene bessere Verständnis eines Lerninhaltes zu verstehen.

Ebenso die von Mehrsprachigkeit und Plurikulturalität geprägte hochschulische Sprachlehr-/-lernsituation an universitären Sprachenzentren fokussierend, erläutert Fischer (2024) den Mehrwert, der durch einen starken Mediationsbezug entsteht. Jedoch plädiert er für die Beibehaltung und die explizite Ausweisung der vier Fertigkeiten Sprechen, Hören, Lesen und Schreiben, parallel zu den vier Kommunikationsmodi Rezeption, Produktion, Interaktion und Mediation. Begründet wird dies damit, dass die vier traditionell vermittelten Fertigkeiten die Tools sind, „learners use in order to manage the four modes of communication" (Fischer, 2024: 88). Zahlreiche Anregungen, wie Mediationsaktivitäten und Mediationsstrategien in die hochschulische Sprachlehre integriert werden können, bieten darüber hinaus die Arbeiten von Cnyrim (2020, 2021) sowie von Bagłajewska-Miglus und Bahr (2020). Grundlegend erscheint mir hier, bei aller Förderung einer „grundlegende[n] Sprachmittlungskompetenz für die mehrsprachige Arbeitsplatzkommunikation von Absolvent*innen anderer Fachrichtungen [d. h. nicht der Translationswissenschaft]" (Cnyrim, 2021: 73), „ihnen Kriterien dafür zu vermitteln, wann sie die Expertise von Translationsprofis in Anspruch nehmen sollten" (Cnyrim, 2021: 75).

Allzu oft trifft man in der Literatur zur Sprachlehr-/-lernforschung im Kontext von Mediation jedoch auf simplifizierende bzw. reduktionistische Vorstellungen von Translation. Es scheint mir problematisch zu sein, wenn der sozialkonstruktivistische Ansatz des GeR-Begleitbands mit Sprachverwender:innen bzw. Sprachlernenden als sozial Handelnden beispielsweise wie folgt beschrieben wird. Durch Kommunikation wird, so Arras und Schumann (2024b), gemeinsam Bedeutung (ko-)konstruiert, wägen die Interaktant:innen diskursiv Aspekte ab, wählen adressatenorientiert Informationen aus, „bereiten sie gezielt für andere auf und *übersetzen oder dolmetschen sie falls erforderlich*" (Arras & Schuhmann, 2024b: 246, eigene Hervorhebung). Mit Aussagen wie diesen wird Sprachkompetenz gewissermaßen mit Übersetzungs- und Dolmetschkompetenz gleichgesetzt. Aus der translationsorientierten Sprachlehr-/-lernforschung wissen wir allerdings, dass „Sprachkompetenz zwar ein essentieller Teil von Translationskompetenz ist, aber

letztere extra entwickelt werden muss und nicht automatisch mit Sprachkompetenz einhergeht“ (Schmidhofer & Recio Ariza, 2020: 42f.). Zusätzlich zur fälschlicherweise angenommenen Gleichsetzung von Sprach- mit Translationskompetenz ist es befremdlich, wenn translatorische Handlungen als rein sprachbezogen definiert und Mediationsaktivitäten gegenübergestellt werden, die all das bieten sollen, was beim Übersetzen und Dolmetschen – so die Annahme – außen vor bleibt.

> Mediation wird dabei als verbindendes Element fungieren, weil ihre Funktion nicht allein die Übertragung von sprachbasierten Informationen aus einer in eine andere Sprache ist (dabei greifen wir ja allzu oft auf das Englische als *lingua franca* zurück, nutzen Übersetzungs-Apps oder lassen unsere Kommunikation gleich von einer KI erledigen). Vielmehr integriert Mediation eben auch (inter)kulturelle, emotionale und psychosoziale Aspekte der zwischenmenschlichen Kommunikation. (Arras & Schuhmann, 2024c: 130f., Hervorhebung im Orig.)

Vorstellungen wie diese von Unterschieden, aber auch von Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen Translation und Mediation untermauern die große Bedeutung, die der Erforschung translationsorientierten Lehrens und Lernens von Sprachen zukommt.

Mediation in der Sprachlehre im Rahmen der Translationsausbildung

Wie eingangs erwähnt, wird translationsorientiertes Sprachenlehren und -lernen seit einigen Jahren unter dem Akronym TILLT (Translation- and Interpreting-oriented Language Learning and Teaching) erforscht. Drei TILLT-Forscher:innen der ersten Stunde stellen im Kontext von Mediation fest, dass „[w]ithin TILLT literature, mediation has hardly been discussed“ (Schmidhofer et al., 2022: 105). Sehr wohl gibt es jedoch in der Translationswissenschaft vermehrt Ansätze dafür, translatorische Basiskompetenzen als Mediationskompetenzen für TOLC einzusetzen, was für „Translation for Other Learning Contexts“ steht, also nicht nur für den Lernkontext im Rahmen von Translationslehre. Diese federführend von González-Davies (2020) vorgeschlagenen Einsatzmöglichkeiten erinnern stark an die Arbeiten von Cnyrim (2020, 2021) sowie von Bagłajewska-Miglus und Bahr (2020) für den deutschsprachigen Raum. González-Davies (2020) argumentiert wie folgt:

> Due to the cross-disciplinary nature of translation […] its study can go beyond its representation as a professional activity. […] [D]espite its pervasive presence, it is still generally simplified and related only to the interlinguistic written mode in classrooms. […] [But] translation should have a place as a natural skill in language learning to cope with our plurilingual contemporary world. (González-Davies, 2020: 447)

Carreres et al. (2021: 5) greifen diese Argumentation auf und analysieren auf nachvollziehbare Weise, weshalb das Mediationskonzept des GeR-Begleitbands in der Community der Sprachlehrenden auf überwiegend positives Echos gestoßen ist. Das Konzept gibt Sprachlehrenden, die den Begriff Translation eher negativ mit der überwunden geglaubten Grammatik-Übersetzungsmethode konnotieren, obwohl sie den Begriff „intuitively perceive as useful, a rubber stamp of approval by providing a less negatively connotated label". Doch es gibt auch sehr kritische Stimmen in der Translationswissenschaft, die den GeR-Begleitband und seine Hervorhebung des Mediationskonzeptes als versäumte Gelegenheit interpretieren, „to redress misconceptions about the nature of T&I [translation & interpreting]" (Stachl-Peier, 2020: 67), weshalb er die häufig noch immer anzutreffende Kluft zwischen Translations- und Sprachlehre weder zu schließen noch zu verringern vermag (Stachl-Peier, 2020: 68). Pym und Hao (2024: 57) werfen dem GeR-Begleitband vor, die Rolle der Translation als Teil der Mediation herunterzuspielen und das Mediationskonzept zu verwässern, indem es Translation entweder als „a very simplistic operation" darstellt oder als „something requiring stratospheric skills that only professional translators possess and language learners do not need". Ihrer Ansicht nach vermeidet der GeR-Begleitband „willfully […] any of the many engaging and productive activities that can be done with translation", was sie sogar so weit bringt, zu fragen "With companions like that, who needs enemies?" (Pym & Hao, 2024: 57) Ungeachtet dieser und ähnlicher aus der Translationswissenschaft kommenden Kritik am GeR-Begleitband und seiner Akzentuierung des Mediationskonzepts bleibt es Aufgabe von TILLT-Lehrenden, Sprachlehre anzubieten, die aktuelle bildungspolitische Entwicklungen, wie eine Abkehr von Monolingualismus oder Native-Speakerism, aufgreift und die speziell auf die Sprachlernanforderungen zukünftiger Übersetzer:innen und Dolmetscher:innen zugeschnitten ist.

Didaktische Implikationen

Lange Zeit wurde in der Forschung zu translationsorientiertem Lehren und Lernen von Sprachen die „Notwendigkeit eines eigenen Zugangs der Translationswissenschaft zum Thema Sprachausbildung" (Yeghoyan, 2020: 28) damit begründet, dass der Gemeinsame europäische Referenzrahmen für Sprachen (GeR) die Zielsetzung verfolgt, in der Zielsprache „für individuelle Zwecke erfolgreich kommunizieren zu können" (Yeghoyan, 2020: 25f.). Im Gegensatz dazu ist es explizites Ziel der prononciert berufsorientierten Sprachausbildung im Rahmen eines translationswissenschaftlichen Studiums, den Studierenden ab dem ersten Studiensemester zu verdeutlichen, „dass die Fremdsprache nicht (nur) für individuelle Zwecke gelernt wird, sondern für die

spätere berufliche sprachmittlerische Tätigkeit“ (Yeghoyan, 2020: 29). Um – wie Yeghoyan (2020) es ausdrückt –, ein regelrechtes Identitätsdilemma von Studierenden beim Übergang von Sprachkursen zu Translationskursen zu vermeiden, gilt es, bereits in der TILLT-Lehre Studierende dabei zu unterstützen, ein Selbstbild als zukünftige Sprachmittler:innen aufzubauen. Das bedeutet, dass dringend zu vermeiden ist, Aufgabenstellungen in TILLT vorwiegend „auf eigene sprachliche Bedürfnisse“ (Yeghoyan, 2020: 29) auszurichten. Nun stellt sich allerdings die Frage, ob diese dem GeR zugeschriebene Ausrichtung auf vornehmlich eigene kommunikative Anliegen noch zutrifft, wenn der GeR-Begleitband den integrativen Kommunikationsmodus Mediation (siehe Abb. 2) wie folgt definiert.

> Bei Mediation agieren die Nutzenden / Lernenden als sozial Handelnde, die Brücken bauen und dazu beitragen, Bedeutung zu konstruieren oder zu vermitteln, manchmal innerhalb einer Sprache, manchmal zwischen Modalitäten […] und manchmal von einer Sprache zur anderen […]. (Europarat, 2020: 112)

Bei aller Problematik im Umgang des GeR-Begleitbands mit den Konzepten und professionellen Tätigkeiten des Dolmetschens und Übersetzens erscheint mir mit seiner Akzentuierung von Mediation das Argument seine Gültigkeit verloren zu haben, Sprachhandeln sei in diesem Dokument des Europarats ausschließlich auf eigene Kommunikationsbedürfnisse ausgerichtet. Nichtsdestotrotz bleibt es zentrale Aufgabe von TILLT-Forschung und TILLT-Praxis, die Charakteristika einer Sprachausbildung herauszuarbeiten, die Absolvent:innen translationswissenschaftlicher Studiengänge auf eine Sprachverwendung (1) zum Nutzen anderer, (2) auf höchstem sprachlichem Niveau und (3) mit ausgeprägter Expertise in Sachen Kulturkompetenz und Translationstechnologie vorbereitet.

Den GeR-Begleitband als Antagonisten zu betrachten (wie etwa bei Pym & Hao, 2024) erscheint mir wenig zielführend. Vielmehr geht es darum, sich im Rahmen von TILLT gewissermaßen mit ihm zu arrangieren. So betonen beispielsweise Schmidhofer et al. (2022: 105) in ihrer Diskussion, welchen Stellenwert Mediation in TILLT einnehmen sollte, „the striking similarities to professional translation and interpreting“, weshalb Mediationsaktivitäten und -strategien im TILLT-Unterricht Studierende dabei unterstützen können, „to take the first steps towards developing TI [translation and interpreting] competence [and] acquaint them with their future role as a mediator“. Sie bezeichnen Mediation als exzellente pädagogische Ressource, damit Translationsstudierende „become expert multilinguals [and] are socialised into a professional culture of language service provision“ (Schmidhofer et al., 2022: 107). Sich als TILLT-Lehrperson dafür verantwortlich zu fühlen, Studierenden zu helfen, in die Rolle als zukünftige

Sprachdienstleister:innen hineinzuwachsen, ist womöglich der bedeutendste Nexus, der zwischen TILLT und Mediation hergestellt werden kann.

Fazit

In diesem Beitrag wurde aus translationswissenschaftlich informierter Perspektive ein kritischer Blick auf das im GeR-Begleitband elaborierte Mediationskonzept geworfen. Dazu wurde Mediation zuerst in der allgemeinen hochschulischen Sprachlehre diskutiert, um darauf aufbauend genauer auf die Sprachlehre im Rahmen der Translationsausbildung (TILLT) einzugehen. Die intensive Beschäftigung mit dem Zusammenhang zwischen Mediation und TILLT hat bei mir teilweise mehr Fragen aufgeworfen, als sie beantwortet. So besteht meines Erachtens nach wie vor größtenteils Verunsicherung – sowohl bei Studierenden als auch bei TILLT-Lehrenden – hinsichtlich der konkreten Einsatzmöglichkeiten von Mediationsaktivitäten und -strategien im translationsorientierten Sprachunterricht. Dies ist einerseits dem Umstand geschuldet, dass womöglich Aufgabenstellungen und Sprachhandlungen, die seit jeher ausgewiesene TILLT-Lehre prägen, zwar Mediation fordern und fördern, aber bis dato nicht als solche explizit gemacht wurden.

Andererseits bleiben Fragen offen, wie etwa jene nach dem konkreten Unterschied zwischen der Mediation von Texten, Konzepten und Kommunikation (siehe Abb. 2), eine Unterscheidung, die von den Autor:innen des GeR-Begleitbands vorgenommen wurde. Und sind die im GeR-Begleitband für den Kommunikationsmodus Mediation vorgeschlagenen Skalen und Deskriptoren überhaupt für TILLT brauchbar? Einen pragmatischen Zugang dazu schlägt Piccardo (2024: 37) vor, wenn sie Sprachlehrenden rät, „to select and combine relevant descriptors according to the goal they are pursuing“. Als federführende Autorin in der Konzeption und Ausarbeitung des GeR-Begleitbands räumt sie ein: „Descriptors that articulate the numerous facets of plurilingualism and mediation, while themselves perhaps not being ‘perfect‘, can spark interest and inspire pedagogical change“ (Piccardo, 2024: 46). Ebenso pragmatisch wie unpolemisch und unaufgeregt empfiehlt Polezzi (2024: 183) – aus der Sicht der Translationswissenschaft – einen Zugang zum Zusammenspiel zwischen Translation und Mediation, der beide auf einem “continuum of practices which we all use to negotiate movement within complex linguistic repertoires” sieht, „which does not conflate the two but stresses their co-presence and interaction“ (182). Einer der am stärksten wirkende Motivator dafür, in der translationsorientierten Sprachlehre bewusst Mediation einzusetzen, sollte letztlich sein, dass Absolvent:innen ihre Expertise anderen vermitteln können. Sie brauchen Mediationskompetenz dafür, verständlich erklären zu können, wann es aus

ethischen oder juristischen Gründen dringend angebracht ist, professionelle Dolmetscher:innen oder Übersetzer:innen in einer Kommunikationssituation hinzuzuziehen. Fehlerhafte Mediationsleistungen können schlimmstenfalls drastische Folgen nach sich ziehen. Es gibt also viel zu tun – für Lehrende wie für Studierende –, um Mediation in der translationsorientierten Sprachlehre ebenso kritisch wie zielführend zum Einsatz zu bringen.

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Romanian as a Foreign Language: Romanian in the Imaginary of the Foreign Student in the Preparatory Year Study Program. The Linguistic and Intercultural Competence of the Foreign Student

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the complexities of intercultural identity development, focusing on the challenges faced by foreigners adapting to a new cultural context. The movement into a new dimension of perception, experience, and education results in boundary ambiguity, where the individuals' original cultural identities become fluid. This process involves internal conflicts, ambivalent moments, and a constant negotiation between loyalty to one's original culture and the need to adapt. The paper also examines how foreign students in Romania experience "personal shock" and how cultural tolerance is often prioritized over respect for the host country, hindering the development of a balanced intercultural identity.

KEYWORDS: *acquisition of a foreign language, linguistic competence, preparatory year, Romanian as a foreign language, Romanian studies*

Introduction

The movement of individuals into a new dimension of perception, experience, and education leads to boundary ambiguity. As a result, the original cultural identity begins to lose its distinctiveness and rigidity, while the emergence of a new identity signifies an increase in interculturality. This process represents a form of self-transcendence, allowing individuals to reach an open system beyond the barriers of their own existence. Consequently, the development of intercultural identity places foreigners in a perpetual state of negotiating the new structure of reality.

The impressions perceived in the social field, both from others and oneself, along with their retention for future reference, become integral parts of a person's evolution. However, this development is far from peaceful, as it involves internal conflicts between loyalty to one's original identity and the need to embrace a new one. The process is marked by ambivalent moments, ups and downs, and advances and setbacks. Intense stress can abruptly reverse the direction of this process, leading to regression, where foreigners re-identify with and reaffirm their ethnic

origins. Such situations often result in a state of alienation, discomfort, and tension in maintaining the new identity.

Although these psychological conflicts are inherent in the development of intercultural identity, the process extends beyond them. Faced with the challenges of intercultural adaptation, newcomers experience a phenomenon known as "personal shock"—a profound disruption of their connection to their original group and a merging of psychological ties with humanity as a whole. Unlike cultural identity, which ties a person to a specific culture, intercultural identity links individuals to multiple cultural universes and, ultimately, to humanity itself. This new form of identity is not rooted in the concept of belonging, which implies ownership or exclusivity to a particular culture, but rather in a style of self-awareness that situates the individual neither fully inside nor outside the cultural context.

They are also capable of experiencing different cultural phenomena, demonstrating a remarkable ability to make decisions and take action in specific situations, without being compelled to adhere to the dominant norms of their culture of origin or the rigidity of the host culture. As a result, their identity becomes more flexible, exhibiting a high level of interculturality and incorporating elements of emotional self-identification that transcend any particular group. This type of identity empowers individuals to decipher unfamiliar cultural stimuli and navigate and appreciate cultural diversity.

Often, in the process of teaching and learning the Romanian language by foreign students in the preparatory year program, the importance of embracing the cultural identity of the host country and adapting to its culture is downplayed. Instead, there is an emphasis on concepts such as cultural, racial, and religious tolerance, with the intention of preserving their own culture. This approach overlooks the respect foreign students should show towards the country that will provide them with professional training for several years. This is a serious concern, as it fosters the idea that they are entitled to anything simply because they are foreigners, while the host country is expected to respect and accommodate their preferences. In this paper, I will explore the factors contributing to this misguided prioritization of the foreign students' interests, which undermines the respect owed to the Romanian people and state.

Romanian language as a foreign language

A community is said to speak its language not for outsiders or foreigners, but solely for itself — "Une communauté sociale ne parle jamais sa langue pour les

étrangers." (Marchand, 1989). Consequently, when a foreigner learns the language of a particular community, they are learning a language that is inherently spoken within that group, not intended for those outside it. Speakers instinctively associate any foreign language (FL) as distinct from their mother tongue (MT). Given this fundamental idea, for a native Romanian speaker, the notion of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) might seem contradictory and challenging to embrace.

In the mind of a native speaker, the idea that their mother tongue could be perceived as a foreign language studied by outsiders may evoke a sense of paradox or unfamiliarity. This notion challenges the intrinsic association of one's native language with personal and cultural identity, raising questions about how it can simultaneously belong to the intimate sphere of native speakers and be approached as an external, learnable object by foreigners. It may also prompt reflections on how outsiders experience and interpret the language differently, emphasizing the complex duality of language as both a marker of internal community identity and an accessible tool for external learners.

How does the Romanian language appear in the linguistic imaginary of a foreigner?

Currently, Poland, through its cultural institutes, is adopting the Korean model to promote the Polish language as a valuable cultural asset abroad. The goal is to leverage storytelling and cultural elements to create soft power that showcases Poland's strengths.

South Korea promotes its cultural identity globally, with its language serving as a key cultural asset. Korean is studied not only across Asia but also in Europe, Africa, the Americas, and beyond.

How does the Romanian language achieve recognition as an exportable language? Or can we, in fact, assert that it currently holds this status?

In our study, we aim to address the following questions:

1. What reasons might lead a foreigner to choose Romanian as a language to study?

2. What factors motivate international students to select Romania as their study destination?

3. How do foreign students perceive the Romanian language?

4. What challenges prevent foreign students from achieving proficiency in spoken Romanian?

5. What factors support and encourage foreign students in speaking Romanian accurately?

Mission and objectives of the Romanian as a foreign language teacher collectives. *Preparatory Year* study program

Each semester, intensive Romanian language courses are organized for foreign students who come to study for a semester or an academic year at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, through various international academic exchange programs and projects, such as the Erasmus Plus program, Erasmus Mundus projects: AL IDRISI, IANUS, EDEN, EMERGE, SILKROUTE, etc.

The Romanian language preparatory program for foreign citizens is a traditional program of the Faculty of Letters at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi. This program is designed for foreigners who do not speak Romanian and wish to pursue undergraduate or postgraduate studies in Romania, with courses taught in Romanian. Its aim is to prepare foreign students for learning the Romanian language and the specialized vocabulary necessary for them to handle various communication situations in daily life, as well as the academic requirements set by Romanian-language study programs.

The aim of the Romanian language preparatory program for foreign citizens is to train foreign citizens accepted into undergraduate or postgraduate programs conducted in Romanian within an academic institutional framework. The goal is to develop their general and professional linguistic communication skills in Romanian, in accordance with the minimum B1 level requirements defined in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* of the Council of Europe.

The objective of the Romanian language preparatory program for foreign citizens is to facilitate the development of communication skills in Romanian, both written and spoken, at the minimum B1 level (independent user), required for admission to undergraduate or postgraduate programs conducted in Romanian within the higher education system in Romania.

In parallel with acquiring linguistic skills, the program also includes a Romanian cultural and civilization component, thus contributing to the development of

adaptation and interaction skills in a new sociocultural context for the participants in this study program.[1]

Romanian as a foreign language from a native speaker's perspective

For a Romanian speaker not involved in teaching Romanian as a foreign language, accepting the concept of Romanian as a foreign language can be challenging. Moreover, this relationship between Romanian as a native language and a foreign language is further influenced by historical, social, cultural, and economic factors.

Although Romanian was recognized as an official European Union language in 2007, and EU language policy aims to discourage discrimination against languages and their categorization into majority and minority languages, Romanian is still considered part of the small language family, both by foreigners and by its native speakers. As a result, Romanians appear to be marked by the complex that their language does not belong to the great languages of culture, as noted by the Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran:

> Să fie oare utopie, dacă am crede că România ar putea să se ridice vreodată peste nivelul şi fatalitatea culturilor mici? […] O anumită generozitate cu România mă face să cred că ea ar putea depăşi cercul îngust al culturilor mici. Acest condiţional defineşte condiţia noastră. Că ea nu se va putea ridica niciodată la nivelul şi semnificaţia culturilor mari este un fapt sigur, ce nu merită a fi discutat.[2]

Under these circumstances, the Romanian speaker finds it difficult to understand why a foreigner might show interest in the Romanian language. Questions such as the following might appear:

- Who would want to learn Romanian nowadays?
- What benefit is there for a foreigner to know Romanian?
- What can you do with Romanian?

These questions highlight not only a distorted and limited perception of the status of the Romanian language but also its place within the broader context of European languages, and beyond.

Furthermore, such an attitude of astonishment becomes uncomfortable when it comes from Romanians who seem shocked that the Romanian language—

[1] For documentation, the official page of the Department of Romanian Language for Foreign Students was consulted: https://lrlsuaic.wixsite.com/uaic/lrls.
[2] Source of the quote: https://www.poezie.ro/index.php/essay/147454/Schimbarea___la_fa%C8%9B%C4%83_a_Rom%C3%A2niei.

considered by some to be "small" and "culturally unimportant"—could be of interest or serve as a subject of study for foreigners.

The devaluation of their own language is evident when Romanians opt to converse in an international language or the native language of foreigners, instead of speaking Romanian with the foreigners who are actively learning it.

However, excluding the Romanian language from the list of languages used for communication with foreigners and adopting "major" languages can also signal a broader inability to recognize the value of minority languages and cultures (Byram, 1992).

According to the theory of social representation in language teaching, a concept introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, the image of the other's language plays a crucial role in shaping how alterity is perceived and classified in general (Zarate, 1993). It also establishes the "power relationship" between participants in the communicative act. In this context, the initiative of a native Romanian speaker to speak in another language, rather than Romanian, could be interpreted as an attempt by the speaker to construct a more favorable image in the eyes of the interlocutor by using a "major" language.

From a psycholinguistic and anthropological perspective, the effects of an identity construction that associates Romanian identity with the harmonious nature of the Romanian language can be observed. This linguistic imagery seems to prevent the native Romanian speaker from recognizing the harmony of their mother tongue in the less-than-harmonious productions of non-native speakers.

The profile of the student in the *Preparatory Year* study program

The students in the preparatory year study program are mostly individuals who have already completed their undergraduate studies in their home country and have decided to pursue a master's program in Romania. In the groups I coordinated, there were also individuals who had just graduated from high school in their home country and chose to pursue university studies in Romania, typically in Medicine. Many of them had left their families for the first time and were experiencing a culture different from their own. The students' ages ranged from 18 to 32 years old. The students come from the following countries: Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Pakistan, Turkey, and Morocco. After completing the preparatory year program, they were set to study at the following faculties: Letters, Arts, Economics and Business Administration, History, Computer Science, and Law.

Regarding their motivation for choosing to study in Romania, the students shared the following reasons:

- They were encouraged or advised by relatives, such as uncles or parents.
- Some had siblings who had already studied in Iaşi and shared the advantages of attending university in Romania.
- Romania's membership in the European Union and its status as a European country, which they believe will / would benefit them later in life.
- Many planned to use Erasmus scholarships to study in other countries, such as Sweden, France, or Portugal, with the intention of settling there in the future.
- Romania is seen as a transit country that offers opportunities for creating a secure future.
- Romania was their second, third, or fourth option after being rejected by other countries but accepted here.

Romanian from the perspective of the foreign student in the *Preparatory Year*

When asked why they chose Romania as the country to study and specialize in a field, several "local parameters" (Platon, 2021) were identified as playing a fundamental role in their decision. These include the specificity of the host culture, the teaching tradition, the organizational structure of universities, the uniqueness of the curriculum, an interest in the Eastern European region, as well as Romania's history, society, and culture.

In order to get a picture of the foreign students' attitudes towards the Romanian language, Romania and Romanians, they answered a series of questions.

When foreign students in the preparatory year were asked to write the first five words or sentences that came to mind about the Romanian language, they shared their perceptions and relationship with it. However, it's worth noting that some misunderstood the prompt, thinking they were supposed to describe the Romanian language rather than respond *in* Romanian.

Therefore, their word choices can be categorized based on:

- frequency and usefulness: common words and phrases like *Bună!* (Hello!), *Bună dimineaţa!* (Good morning!), *Mulţumesc!* (Thank you!), *La revedere!* (Goodbye!), *Ce faci?* (How are you?), *mâncare* (food), *iubire* (love), etc.;
- level of difficulty: words with complex structures, such as *străzile* (the streets) and *ouăle* (the eggs);
- emblematic character: culturally representative words, such as *Dracula*, *vampir* (vampire), *sarmale* (cabbage rolls), *Eminescu* (a famous Romanian poet), *mămăligă* (polenta), *ciorbă* (sour soup), and *Cuza* (a historical figure).

In terms of their perception of the Romanian language, they refer to its level of linguistic or learning difficulty with words such as *grea* (hard), *uşoară* (easy), *simplă* (simple), *dificilă* (difficult), and *complicată* (complex).

According to foreign students in the preparatory year, they describe the Romanian language as follows:

- *Limba română este formată din masculin, feminin şi neutru.*

  (Romanian has masculine, feminine, and neuter genders.)
- *Limba română este foarte dificilă, mai ales verbele.*

  (Romanian is very difficult, especially the verbs.)
- *Gramatica este grea.*

  (The grammar is hard.)
- *Oamenii vorbesc repede, este dificil să înţeleg totul.*

  (People speak quickly, and it's hard to understand everything.)
- *Fiecare lucru are gen.*

  (Every noun has a gender.)
- *Verbul are multe forme diferite.*

  (The verb has many different forms.)
- *Există multe cuvinte similare cu cele din engleză.*

  (There are many words similar to those in English.)

Regarding the qualities of Romanian, students described it as *frumoasă* (beautiful), *vocalică* (vocalic), *muzicală* (musical), *bogată* (rich), *interesantă* (interesting), and *provocatoare* (challenging).

Among their motivations for studying Romanian, they mentioned:

- for their future;

- to communicate with patients;

- to talk with their girlfriend or boyfriend.

Much depends on how teachers of Romanian as a foreign language present and teach the language, as we will later see how their approach shapes the learners' perceptions and understanding of Romanian as they progress in their studies.

The linguistic competence of foreign students

In the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR, 2003), linguistic competence is defined as follows:

> competența care îi permite unei persoane să acționeze, utilizând cu precădere mijloacele lingvistice (CECR, 2003)
>
> (the competence which enables a person to act, using mainly linguistic means).

Linguistic competence encompasses lexical, phonological, and syntactical knowledge, as well as language-related skills. These skills represent various aspects of language as a system, separate from the sociolinguistic value of its variations and the practical functions of its applications in communication (CEFR, 2003). Acquiring, developing, and applying these components help improve communication abilities, which include understanding spoken or written texts and producing written or oral messages.

For teachers of Romanian as a foreign language, linguistic competence is a central focus, representing the primary goal for students to achieve. However, it is not the only competency foreign students must acquire. The CEFR highlights that overall communicative competence is composed of several elements: the linguistic component, the sociolinguistic component, and the pragmatic component. Each of these components consists primarily of knowledge, skills, and abilities (CEFR, 2003). This broader view underscores the importance of teaching a range of competencies to support the students' full integration and language use in diverse contexts.

Linguistic barrier and its effects on foreign students' integration and success

During the process of learning a new language, many foreign students encounter a significant linguistic barrier. For those who struggle to gain proficiency in Romanian, this barrier becomes an obstacle to adapting fully to the host society. Without a conversational grasp of the language, these students often face difficulties in forming friendships with native Romanians, which can negatively affect their motivation and lower their self-esteem. This lack of confidence may also impact their belief in their own abilities, creating a cycle where they feel less capable of progressing.

The linguistic barrier not only limits social interactions but also restricts the students' full participation in essential aspects of life. This restriction can lead to lower academic grades, reduce their earning potential, and narrow the freedom to make personal and career choices. Over time, this barrier can also hinder cognitive development, as limited language proficiency results in knowing less and being able to accomplish fewer tasks.

A related risk is language fossilization, where students may develop the belief that improvement is impossible. This mindset, often arising from the frustration of limited progress, can prevent further attempts to master the language, leaving students feeling resigned to their current skill level.

Extra-linguistic barrier: comfort level and teaching adjustments

Another critical factor is the extra-linguistic barrier, often tied to a student's comfort level in a multicultural, multi-level learning environment. As the need to work with groups of varying language proficiency grows, this approach brings both advantages and challenges. Teaching mixed-level groups can foster peer learning and inclusivity, but it can also create uneven progress and make it challenging to address all students' individual needs effectively.

In these settings, the role of the teacher expands beyond language instruction. Teachers must take on a supportive role similar to that of a psychologist, as they encounter student concerns that reach beyond grammatical understanding. Managing such dynamics requires sensitivity and adaptability, as teachers often address emotional and motivational issues that affect the students' learning experiences and their broader integration into Romanian society.

Linguistic attitudes and their role in learning Romanian

The willingness to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner when a foreign student is asked to perform in the Romanian language is closely connected to several factors that influence the process of learning Romanian. These factors include linguistic identity, linguistic fidelity, linguistic conflict, linguistic attitudes, and others. This socio-psychological concept, while difficult to observe and measure directly and objectively, is often understood through inferences drawn from the student's behavior and responses.

Thus, the attitude that a foreign student has towards the Romanian language, as well as towards their own language, reflects their positive or negative feelings about Romanian. These attitudes can reveal how the student perceives the difficulty or simplicity of the language, the ease or challenge of learning Romanian, and the importance of the language in their personal and academic life. Additionally, factors such as the perceived elegance of the language and its associated social status can influence the student's attitude.

The attitude a student holds towards Romanian also extends to their perception of the speakers of the language. A foreign student may form judgments about the Romanian-speaking community, which can further shape their engagement with the language.

It is important to note that linguistic attitudes are dynamic and can change over time, depending on the individual's experiences, the contexts in which they are asked to use Romanian, and their evolving relationship with the language. For instance, a student's attitude can be influenced by their academic progress, social interactions, or personal experiences with Romanian speakers.

For the language to be valued, it must prove its utility to the student. Attitudes are a significant factor in language learning because they influence motivation and engagement. Regardless of the student's intelligence or natural aptitude, attitudes toward Romanian play a crucial role in their success. Various elements contribute to shaping these attitudes: the teacher, whether learning Romanian is compulsory or optional, the interference of other foreign languages, the student's feelings towards the Romanian-speaking community, the textbook used, and the overall educational infrastructure.

Building a positive attitude is crucial because it can ease the learning process and help ensure that the student continues to use and value the language even after formal education ends. For example, Polish students, after completing their studies, may seek to maintain a connection with the Romanian-speaking

community, demonstrating an integrative orientation in addition to their instrumental orientation—a focus on academic success or passing exams.

Additionally, linguistic loyalty and its associated defensive mechanisms represent a phenomenon where speakers preserve their native language—whether through its functions, structure, or vocabulary. This form of loyalty is deeply ingrained in every speaker, as the emotional connection to one's mother tongue makes any deviation from it seem unappealing. This emotional bond with the native language often leads to a sense of attachment that protects it from perceived external influences. (Weinreich, 2013)

The intercultural competence of the foreign student. The challenge of adapting to Romanian culture for foreign students

For many foreign students, Romania is the first country they visit, making it their initial exposure to a culture very different from their own. For some, adapting to the new culture of the host country can be an extremely challenging experience. Many students tend to stay within their own communities, preferring not to interact with Romanians. When asked if they socialize with their Romanian colleagues, their answer is often negative.

To address this, in the second semester of the preparatory year, there is a course dedicated to Romanian cultural identity. In the first lesson, students were asked about their knowledge of Romanian culture in its various forms—such as music, literature, art, and films. Many of them admitted they knew little or nothing about Romanian culture.

To help bridge this gap, various workshops are organized on special cultural days throughout the year, such as 1st March, Christmas, 24th January, and Easter. These workshops aim to introduce foreign students to different aspects of Romanian culture. For instance, some workshops were held in partnership with the Palace of Culture in Iaşi through the DICE workshops. In these sessions, students first learned about the cultural significance of the event being celebrated, followed by hands-on activities, such as painting Easter eggs or making marzipan.

Through these activities, students are given the opportunity to engage with Romanian traditions, promoting a deeper understanding of the culture while fostering interaction between foreign students and Romanians.

Conclusions

The role of a Romanian as a Foreign Language teacher extends to promoting the Romanian language as a valuable cultural asset. In many ways, the teacher serves as an unofficial ambassador, advocating for both the language and culture, while helping to globalize Romanian studies. The way in which the teacher shapes the students' perception of the Romanian language throughout their learning journey plays a crucial role in this process. It is essential that the Romanian language proves its relevance and utility to the student, as attitude is a key factor in successful language learning.

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The Power of "YET": Growth Mindset

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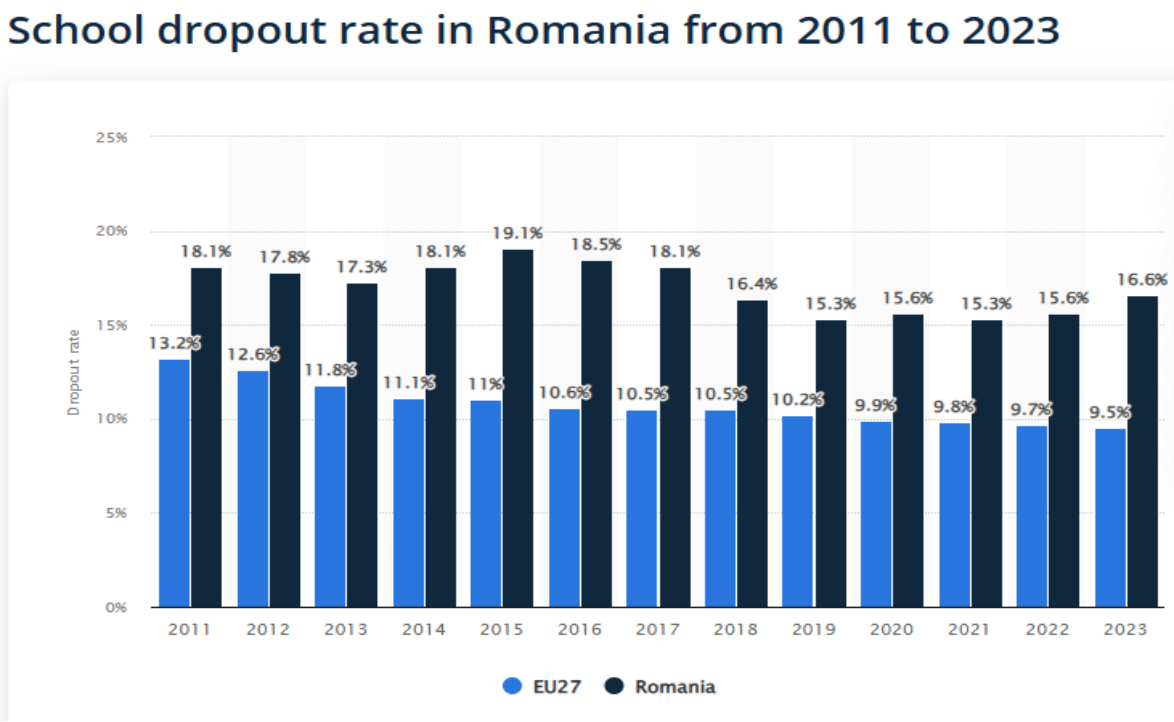
ABSTRACT

In educational systems where students must complete numerous subjects to graduate, alternative assessment methods may offer significant benefits. Rather than assigning failing grades, teachers could instead use the phrase "not yet" to indicate that students have room for improvement. This approach aligns with Carol Dweck's theory on the power of "not yet," which suggests that fostering a growth mindset can motivate students to persist and improve. We conducted a study among Romanian students to examine the impact of alternative assessment forms and of the sandwich feedback technique on learning outcomes. Our findings corroborate Dweck's conclusions, demonstrating that emphasizing progress over static grading enhances academic performance and reduces dropout rates. This study suggests that adopting a growth-oriented evaluation model could serve as a viable strategy for educational reform, particularly in systems with high course requirements for graduation.

KEYWORDS: *education, growth mindset, fixed mindset, sandwich feedback, evaluation*

Concerning problem: school dropout rates in Romania and Europe

School dropout rates in Romania have been a longstanding concern, particularly when contrasting urban and rural regions. Rural areas experience notably higher dropout rates due to a range of economic, social, and infrastructural barriers. According to Eurostat and Romania's National Institute of Statistics (INS, Annual Report 2023), approximately 15.6% of students in Romania left school before completing secondary education in 2022, significantly above the EU average of 9.7%. Reducing the dropout rate remains a critical goal for Romania, which has committed to lowering it to 10% by 2030 in alignment with EU targets.



Source: Statista

In rural areas, the school dropout rate is often up to three times higher compared to urban areas. Reports suggest that the dropout rate in rural regions can exceed 26%, while it typically remains around 6-7% in urban areas. A study conducted by Save the Children Romania highlights that 38% of children in rural areas are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, which are key factors contributing to the high rates of early school leaving. The dropout rate in primary and lower secondary education (grades 1-8) is also much higher in rural areas, where students face challenges such as long distances to school, lack of transportation, underfunded educational facilities but also the strong belief of the children and parents alike that institutional education would have very little positive impact on their future life. (Peticilă, 2019) By contrast, urban schools generally have better infrastructure, resources, and proximity to students' homes, all factors that keep dropout rates lower. The dropout rate in upper secondary education (high school) also shows a stark contrast between urban areas, with a dropout rate of around 4-5%, and rural areas, with rates up to 18%. (Peticilă, 2019) To fight Romania's dropout rates and to even this clear urban-rural divide, efforts are being made through national and EU-funded programs to reduce these disparities by improving infrastructure, providing financial support to families, and encouraging participation and positive action in education.

Endorsing the national institutional remedial measures, there are also some actions to be taken individually, at the level of the classroom. In this respect we delved into the recent field of neuroplasticity and the psychological consequences of a fixed mindset. We explored the educational impact of regarding our children as evolving learners, bearing in mind how the growing brain can adapt to new challenges. In the present article we will investigate the educational impact of the pioneering work of Carol Dweck and her research about the "Growth Mindset," (Dweck, 2006) which builds on to the principles of neuroplasticity and the most recent studies in children psychology and development.

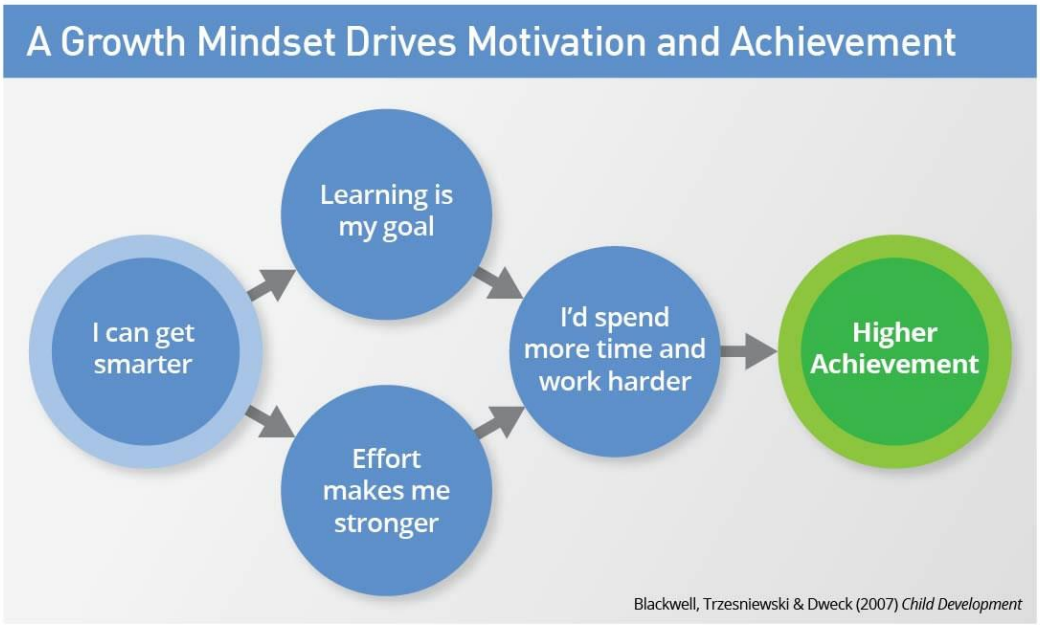
Studies on brain plasticity indicate that the connections between neurons can evolve with experience and learning whereas consistent practice allows neural networks to form new pathways, strengthen existing connections, and build insulation that accelerates signal transmission. These findings suggest that actions like using effective strategies, asking questions, practicing regularly, and maintaining healthy nutrition and sleep habits can actively promote neural growth. (Voss & Thomas [et al.], 2017) Thus, neuroscience research seems to fully confirm Dweck's theory, demonstrating that the brain, especially in children, is much more adaptable than previously thought. This is why "the educational system is not just a means of transmitting knowledge but also a complex environment where students' mental states, behaviors, and cognitive functions come together to influence learning outcomes. Psychological aspects such as motivation, self-efficacy, and emotional well-being significantly impact students' engagement and performance." (Mehrad, Bouzedif, & Rweramila, 2024: 4128) Carol Dweck's emphasis on the impact of the "power of (not) yet" is thus relevant and applicable today, encouraging teachers and inspiring students to develop a growth mindset by framing their journey as one of continuous learning and progress, encouraging them to see effort and persistence as the keys to overcoming current limitations and achieving their goals.

"The Force Behind Limitless Potential". Carol Dweck's theories applied in education

Carol Dweck's research integrates developmental, social, and personality psychology to examine how people's mindsets shape their self-view and behavior. Together with Heidi Grant, Dweck highlighted new insights on fostering a growth mindset in organizations and institutions, with special focus on education. The key takeaway is that individuals and organizations with a growth mindset are more open to learning, continually evolving, and building the resilience necessary for high achievement. Although mindset is often associated with individuals,

organizations also adopt mindsets that influence their culture and growth. Those with a growth mindset view intelligence and talent as starting points, understanding that hard work and perseverance drive further development. By contrast, those with a fixed mindset see intelligence and talent as fixed traits, focusing more on proving their worth rather than developing it, which limits their growth potential. (Dweck & Grant, 2003) For instance, individuals with a fixed mindset often focus on "being good" at something, whereas those with a growth mindset are oriented towards "getting better."

According to Dweck's findings nobody has a pure growth or fixed mindset but each individual will position her/himself on a spectrum between the two that can shift, depending on the situation. In the education system and the classroom daily routine, for a teacher who pays attention to the different types of individuals, it becomes easier to discern a student's dominant mindset. To support the cultivation or reinforcement of a growth mindset, the strategic use of the word "yet" can be instrumental in fostering ongoing learning and development. The "power of yet" encapsulates a remarkable capacity for transformation, despite its brevity. This term proves particularly impactful in three areas of education: encouraging continuous learning, sustaining engagement, and building confidence when working with students facing challenges. (Dweck, 2006) Consequently, discussions with students who adopt a growth mindset can focus on enhancing skills they have not yet mastered. Those with a growth mindset see themselves as "works in progress," confident enough to acknowledge areas where improvement is still underway. This perspective also helps students to embrace challenges they have not yet encountered. In an environment that prioritizes growth, perceived weaknesses are redefined as "strengths not yet developed." This reframing provides a balanced view of current limitations while also offering encouragement for continued progress and resilience. (Dweck, 2006) And indeed, recent research confirms through empirical studies the positive impact of a growth mindset by predicting not only academic achievement but also academic enjoyment (Barbouta, Barbouta, & Kotrotsiou, 2020: 654-664) and diminishing considerably the school dropout rate.


A Growth Mindset Drives Motivation and Achievement
Learning is my goal
I can get smarter
I'd spend more time and work harder
Higher Achievement
Effort makes me stronger
Blackwell, Trzesniewski & Dweck (2007) Child Development

Cited by: https://www.mindsetworks.com/science/, 1.11.2024

To support educators in adopting a genuine growth mindset that truly informs their teaching practices, it may be essential to recognize the role of the fixed mindset. This means acknowledging that (1) each of us harbors both fixed and growth mindsets, (2) this duality will likely persist, and (3) to genuinely progress toward a growth-oriented mindset, we must stay mindful of our fixed-mindset reactions and behaviors. (Dweck, 2015) Surprisingly, attempting to "eliminate" the fixed mindset can lead to superficial growth that lacks authenticity. However, by carefully observing and reflecting on the fixed-mindset triggers[1], we can take meaningful steps on the journey towards an authentic growth, with lasting impact on our teaching and personal development.

[1] Carol Dweck enumerates such triggers: "Watch for a fixed-mindset reaction when you face challenges. Do you feel overly anxious, or does a voice in your head warn you away? Watch for it when you face a setback in your teaching, or when students aren't listening or learning. Do you feel incompetent or defeated? Do you look for an excuse? Watch to see whether criticism brings out your fixed mindset. Do you become defensive, angry, or crushed instead of interested in learning from the feedback? Watch what happens when you see an educator who's better than you at something you value. Do you feel envious and threatened, or do you feel eager to learn? Accept those thoughts and feelings and work with and through them. And keep working with and through them." (Dweck, 2015).

"The Power of Yet" in the process of evaluation

Carol Dweck's Ted Talk presentation from 2014 opens with this story:

> I heard about a high school in Chicago where students had to pass a certain number of courses to graduate, and if they didn't pass a course, they got the grade "Not Yet." And I thought that was fantastic, because if you get a failing grade, you think, I'm nothing, I'm nowhere. But if you get the grade 'Not Yet' you understand that you're on a learning curve. It gives you a path into the future." (Dweck TED-Talk, 2014)

These two simple words, NOT YET, instilled hope in students, showing them that success was achievable, if they made another attempt, and motivating them to persevere. By contrast, assigning a failing grade can lead students to feel stagnant and more inclined to "give up" rather than continue putting in effort. Failure often implies finality and carries a stigma. The concept of "not yet" suggests a future opportunity and reassures students that success is attainable in time. This approach signals to struggling students that their current performance does not define their ability or worth, but rather opens a pathway forward, conveying: "You may succeed in this course the next time you try." (Bergen & Bressler, 2020: 4-5) Following an organizational model (Farnan Street, 2016), there are some attributes that create a growth-mindset also in the school environment, such as

- Presenting skills rather than knowledge;
- Presenting skills as learnable;
- Conveying value to learning and perseverance, not to ready-made genius or talent;
- Giving feedback in a way that promotes learning and future success; and
- Presenting teachers as resources for learning and not as know-it-alls and judges.

A key aspect of the "Power of Yet" rests in the way teachers offer feedback to their students. In their quest for good grades that can ensure access to higher education and a future successful career, students are often encouraged to look for the easy way out, to focus on the outcome and end-result, being thus dependent on the validation from the teachers and parents. Carol Dweck offers once again the solution: "Don't praise intelligence or talent, praise the work ethic." (Dweck TED Talk, 2015) Her insight is supported by numerous studies across diverse age groups, ethnicities, and backgrounds, all examining the impact of different types of praise. These studies reveal that praising children for being "smart" tends to encourage a fixed mindset, while focusing praise on their hard work and effort fosters a growth mindset.

Focusing on the work progress and the individual's effort means that the feedback should be carefully constructed, so as to highlight the positive outcomes but also to draw attention to what it is "not yet" achieved. This can be best applied using the "sandwich method." According to various researchers, the sandwich feedback is "a specific negative statement surrounded by two positive ones." (Prochazkaa, Ovcaria & Durinika, 2020: 3) Its merit lies in the fact that "beginning and ending with praise should build the recipient's trust and comfort, increase the recipient's receptivity to negative comments, mitigate the effects that negative feedback might have on the recipient's self-image, and increase motivation, receptivity and engagement." (Parkes [et al.], 2013: 398) Although this method has been sometimes criticized as being artificial (Cantillon & Sargeant, 2008) and as mocking the trust relationship between evaluator and recipient (von Bergen, Bressler & Campbell, 2014) in our view it is a perfect way to integrate Dweck's "Power of Yet," since it focuses both on the positive and the merits of the work, simultaneously integrating that what is "not *yet* achieved" and "what can be *yet* better."

Teachers can also use the word "yet" to help sustain student engagement, particularly with tasks where the teacher's enthusiasm may surpass that of the students. For instance, as a deadline approaches, teachers might ask, "How is your progress on X? Are you ready to review it yet?" By including "yet," teachers convey an expectation for dialogue about the task while also allowing room for students who may need additional time to complete it.

Students' perspectives on risk and effort stem from their underlying mindset. Some recognize the importance of pushing their boundaries and are motivated to put in the necessary effort to learn and develop. Some not. Through carefully constructed feedback and using the "Power of Yet" we can encourage students to have a growth mindset, to take on challenges and learn for themselves and not for grades or external validation, therefore increasing their abilities and achievement. Focusing on what your students know and can do, on their long-term critical thinking, and on developing continuous learning strategies, teachers can become more engaged in preparing students for life beyond the classroom.

"The Power of Yet" in Romanian secondary and tertiary education

To explore how this alternative feedback approach could impact our classroom practices, we designed a student-centered questionnaire with both closed and open questions aimed at examining Carol Dweck's theory of "The Power of Yet." We surveyed 60 high school and undergraduate students (ages 15–21) with diverse

learning habits and backgrounds: 65% have lived exclusively in a large city, 30% come from small towns in the Moldavia region, and 5% spent their early childhood in rural areas. This small percentage of students from rural areas who managed to access higher education illustrates the challenging educational conditions in these regions. Conducted as part of an English class, the questionnaire invited students to reflect on their learning experiences and the ways they have been assessed across different subject areas.

The survey was divided into two main sections. In the first part, students were asked to respond to some knowledge-based questions: 48% had a good understanding of Carol Dweck's theory, while the other half could approximate the main idea of "The Power of Yet," namely that one can master any skill with time and effort. In the second part of the survey, students were invited to reflect on past challenges and obstacles they had encountered in the learning process and to identify a subject or skill they found particularly difficult. The following question focused on how they managed to overcome that particular obstacle, and their responses highlighted, as expected, the importance of peer feedback and teacher guidance.[2]

When asked about their attitude towards mistakes and failure, the students were less apologetic than expected, instead focusing on finding the best strategies for them to address and learn from their mistakes.[3] Using the feedback "not yet" instead of an unsatisfactory grade as an evaluation tool was positively received by the respondents. In fact, 93% of the students reported that they found this form of evaluation encouraging and focused on growth potential rather than on a fixed outcome.

Invited to write down their take from Dweck's theories, the students offered examples of her "growth mindset," like: "Nothing is tough, if you put your mind to it," "When you encounter a tough problem or assignment, I stay focused on the subject and work to improve myself," "Nothing seems easy, if you concentrate on the whole picture. You won't be master at something by default but that doesn't mean it is impossible," "Try it more and more and never give up. It does not matter if you fail, you can improve yourself at any time."

[2] Some samples of student's answers: "I struggled with public speaking. What helped the most was receiving constructive feedback which allowed me to improve step by step." Another example: "It seemed impossible to me at first when I started learning French. But with the help of a great teacher I was able to cope with it."

[3] Samples of answers: "I don't feel upset or ashamed when I make mistakes. It is important for me to know that it's human to make mistakes and that I can't have the answers for everything." Or : "I would strive to understand what I did wrong and to fix my knowledge about that. Yes, it [the growth mindset] has helped me, and I use it every day!" or "I learn from my mistakes and others' mistakes. Practice makes perfect!"

Despite the positive feedback and the insightful remarks of the students who participated in the survey, there are some potential limitations when considering a direct classroom implementation of Carol Dweck's theories on "Growth Mindset" and "The Power of (Not) Yet." The Romanian education system has an inherent cultural resistance when it comes to feedback, perceived and given almost always in the binary form of "Right" or "Wrong". In many cases, evaluation is modeled by comparing individual achievements to those of peers. As a result, most Romanian students, when receiving their evaluation, focus on their position within a social or professional hierarchy, rather than on their own individual growth or transformation.

Additionally, there is a lack of adequate teacher training in feedback techniques and alternative assessment methods. As a result, even though Dweck's principles are increasingly recognized in theory and applied widely in entrepreneurial environments, only a limited number of educators possess the methodological and pedagogical skills required to apply these principles effectively in the classroom.

Conclusions

Given the results of our survey and bearing in mind the limitations discussed, there is a strong case for integrating Dweck's "Power of (Not) Yet" theory and alternative grading approaches into the Romanian education system. Such practices would not only boost student motivation and create more individualized learning pathways but also foster resilience and a growth mindset – essential skills for navigating adult life. Embracing the "not yet" approach may inspire students to persevere in their learning both within and beyond the classroom, encouraging long-term academic engagement and personal development.

Carol Dweck's studies and the immense literature that followed her insights clearly illustrate the fact that students who recognized that intelligence is adaptable achieved higher academic success compared to those who perceived it as a fixed attribute. In a structured learning program, students who were taught that they could "grow their brains" and enhance their intellectual abilities demonstrated marked improvements. Our small survey on high school and undergraduate students confirmed these findings and showed that students' beliefs about their own capabilities greatly impact their motivation and performance. Additionally, encouraging students to focus on the learning process – through effort and trying new strategies – helps cultivate a growth mindset, leading to resilience and ongoing progress. Furthermore, adopting this mindset can alleviate students' fear of failure and promote a greater willingness to take

risks and embrace challenges. These insights provide parents and educators with practical ways to support children's academic and personal development every day.

This method encourages educators to emphasize individual student progress over rigid adherence to standardized benchmarks, allowing for more personalized feedback and support. Through this approach, teachers can help students identify their strengths and areas for development, improving learning outcomes and better addressing diverse learning needs. Implementing this feedback practice also builds resilience in students, reinforcing the idea that mastery requires time and effort. By framing learning as a journey where setbacks contribute to growth, students are likely to develop a robust growth mindset, equipping them with essential skills to overcome future challenges both academically and personally.

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Articulandia, ossia come "storificare" la grammatica

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the use of storytelling as a teaching tool to instruct fifth-grade students in Italian grammar. The author, a foreign language teacher, describes the creative process behind building a "grammar story" —an imaginary story set in a kingdom called Articulandia—to engagingly explain the use of definite articles in Italian. Through examples and anecdotes, the article highlights the effectiveness of "storification" in increasing students' interest and participation. The author concludes by encouraging fellow teachers to experiment with this method, suggesting the sharing of other grammatical stories as a collective educational resource.

KEYWORDS: *story, storify grammar, storification, Italian, definite article*

Come insegnante di lingua straniera mi sono sempre impegnata a utilizzare metodi moderni e interattivi per coinvolgere i miei alunni. Tuttavia, ho notato che spesso questi mostrano noia, soprattutto durante le lezioni di grammatica. Ispirata da storie che hanno reso la matematica e l'inglese più coinvolgenti per i miei figli, ho deciso di "storificare" la grammatica e ho inventato una "grammastoria" per spiegare l'uso degli articoli determinativi singolari. Il successo di questa iniziativa mi ha spinta a riflettere sull'efficacia della narrazione nell'insegnamento della grammatica e condividere la mia esperienza con altri insegnanti, invitandoli a creare le loro proprie storie grammaticali.

Ecco come è iniziato tutto:

È l'autunno dell'anno scolastico 2022–2023, il mio secondo anno come insegnante di italiano. Sono consapevole di stare sfruttando appieno la mia esperienza come insegnante di inglese. Tante attività audiovisive, tanti film, tanti giochi ecc. Penso spesso a quanto siano fortunati i miei alunni ad avere un'insegnante come me, che utilizza tanti materiali e metodi moderni e innovativi (che io, "ai miei tempi", non potevo neanche immaginare).

Eppure, a volte, un pensiero assillante ombreggia le mie giornate. Tutti i miei sforzi, tutte quelle schede colorate, i film, i codici QR, i giochi didattici, le slide

attraenti e le attività interattive sembrano non essere sufficienti. Quando le cose devono diventare (per forza) un po' più serie (soprattutto quando dobbiamo affrontare un argomento grammaticale), le parole che mi vengono in mente guardando alcune delle facce dei miei alunni sono noia, indifferenza e distrazione… E così i miei stati d'animo variano spesso durante una settimana, e a volte persino durante la stessa lezione, da euforia – nel vederli attivi, attenti, coinvolti—a disperazione totale—quando devo spiegare per la terza volta la stessa cosa!

Poi, dopo solo qualche settimana dopo nella nuova scuola, mia figlia (9 anni), che aveva sempre dichiarato di odiare la matematica, mi dice una sera prima di andare a letto che non vede l'ora di fare la lezione di matematica il giorno dopo. "Come mai?", chiedo. E lei mi dice come la nuova maestra le aveva raccontato una storia (durante, si badi bene, la lezione di matematica!) su come in un'equazione, l'incognita fosse la principessa rinchiusa in una torre e come la loro missione era quella di liberarla, lottando con i guardiani della torre—prima con le parentesi tonde, poi con quelle quadre e poi con quelle graffe—e risolvendo dei misteri in un ordine ben preciso—partendo dalla moltiplicazione, continuando con la divisione, e infine l'addizione e la sottrazione.

Qualche settimana dopo, mio figlio (11 anni) torna da scuola tutto contento e mi racconta come l'insegnante d'inglese gli aveva raccontato una storia buffa: mentre *Io* e *Tu* non hanno affatto soldi, *Lui* ne ha in abbondanza: infatti ne ha tanti che dobbiamo mettere il simbolo del dollaro alla fine di ogni suo verbo (ad esempio, *he live$*). Pieno di soldi, *Lui* dà dei dollari anche a *Lei* (e allora *she live$*) e persino al loro gatto (*it live$*). E poi ci sono anche quelli ricchi sfondati che hanno sia dollari che euro (e, quindi, *he go€$*, *she go€$*, *it go€$*).

I giorni passano e, senza darci troppa importanza, a volte mi sorprendo a pensare alle due storie. E poi una notte non riesco a dormire. Il giorno dopo devo insegnare gli articoli determinativi singolari agli allievi della quinta classe. Non so come, ma nella mia mente comincia a spuntare una storia: un re, un regno, una legge, due gruppi di disubbidienti.... Per paura di non dimenticarla fino alla mattina, prendo il cellullare e la scrivo. Ma la mia mente non vuole fermarsi: modifica, rielabora la storia, ci aggiunge più dettagli: un orecchino, una palla.... La storia sta diventando sempre più chiara. Comincio ad immaginare come dovrei presentare tale storia, cosa e come sarebbe meglio scrivere e disegnare alla lavagna…

Fra qualche ora sono in classe, davanti ai miei alunni di quinta elementare. Chiedo: "Volete che vi racconti una storia?". Tutti entusiasti: "Sì!". Comincio: racconto, spiego, ogni tanto scrivo e disegno alla lavagna, rispondo alle loro domande. Mi rallegro vedendo il loro interesse; sono tutti presenti, connessi, tutti

gli occhi mi guardano e tutte le orecchie mi ascoltano. Un alunno seduto in prima fila mi chiede, tutto serio e innocente, "Ma questa Articolandia è un paese vero?!". "Ce l'ho fatta!", penso. Esco dalla classe tutta contenta, con qualche idea su come potrei migliorare la mia storia, su cosa potrei aggiungere, anche in base alla loro reazione e alle difficoltà che ho notato nel raccontare la storia. Scrivo tutto su un foglio per paura di non dimenticare. Mi sembra proprio di aver scoperto (o, anzi, inventato) l'America!

Qualche giorno dopo mi trovo di nuovo di fronte alla stessa classe. "Professoressa, ci potrebbe raccontare di nuovo quella storia?". Comincio a balbettare. Vorrei tanto poter dire: "Ne ho tante altre storie sulla grammatica italiana che vi racconterò al tempo giusto!".

Tormentata dalla paura di non deluderli, mi vengono in mente tante domande: Ci sono anche altri insegnanti che sentono questo bisogno di "narrare" le cose più difficili o più aride ai loro allievi? Dove posso trovare storie simili per insegnare la grammatica? È questo un metodo "legittimo" di insegnamento? Nel caso sia legittimo, come si chiama questo metodo didattico? Cosa ne dicono gli studi in quanto la sua efficacia?

Comincio, dunque, a cercare libri con storie "già pronte" per insegnare la grammatica dell'italiano come lingua straniera. Cerco e cerco, ma non ne trovo niente. Estendo le mie ricerche all'insegnamento dell'inglese, pensando che, siccome è una lingua più studiata come lingua straniera, avrò più successo. Scarsi risultati anche questa volta.

Decido di chiamare la maestra di mia figlia. Le chiedo dove aveva trovato quella storiella sull'incognita. Mi dice che se l'era inventata lei per attirare l'attenzione degli allievi. Chiamo poi l'insegnante di inglese di mio figlio: pure lei aveva inventato la storia dei verbi al *Present Simple* per aiutare i suoi allievi a ricordarsi di mettere la "s" alla terza persona singolare; per di più, poi, quando uno di loro si dimenticava della "s" mentre parlava, lei, senza dire niente, faceva soltanto il gesto dei soldi per correggerlo.

Entrambe le storielle che avevano affascinato i miei figli erano quindi nate come risposta dell'insegnante ai bisogni e alle difficoltà degli studenti di fronte a due discipline talmente diverse. L'intuizione di queste due insegnanti e la loro capacità di adattare il loro approccio per rispondere alle esigenze dei propri studenti le aveva spinte ad adottare una modalità di insegnamento nuova, la cui essenza consiste nel trasformare in storia il contenuto da insegnare.

Questo impulso a "narrare" gli argomenti da insegnare corrisponde, sicuramente, al bisogno degli insegnanti di rendere i contenuti più accessibili e memorizzabili.

E quale altro mezzo migliore per fare questo se non la storia, lo strumento più antico e potente per trasmettere conoscenze e valori?

Le ragioni per cui le storie sono così accattivanti per gli esseri umani sono state oggetto di numerosi studi, portando allo strepitoso successo che lo *storytelling* ha avuto, negli ultimi decenni, in vari campi della nostra vita, soprattutto nella politica e nel business. Si vedano, a proposito, gli accattivanti libri di Haven (2007), di Cron (2012), di Jonathan Gottschall (2013) o di Smorti (2018), per nominarne solo alcuni.

Per fortuna, lo *storytelling* si sta facendo strada anche nella didattica, ma a un livello piuttosto limitato – una cosa non tanto sorprendente, considerando che l'educazione tende a rispondere più lentamente alle nuove tendenze. Bensì già dal 1973 lo scrittore italiano Gianni Rodari esplorava, nel suo affascinante libro *Grammatica della fantasia. Introduzione all'arte di inventare storie* (1973), l'incredibile potere educativo delle fiabe, strumenti utilissimi per stimolare l'immaginazione e la creatività dei bambini, le storie cominciano a suscitare interesse in ambito educativo solo molto più tardi. Oltre ai numerosi articoli sull'uso dello storytelling (nella sua moltitudine di forme e accezioni) nell'insegnamento formale, cominciano ad essere pubblicati sempre più libri che promuovono l'utilizzo delle narrazioni da parte degli insegnanti: si notino, ad esempio, *Insegnare con la letteratura fiabesca* (2018) di Rosa Tiziana Bruno, sociologa, scrittrice e insegnante italiana, e *Story-Based Language Teaching* (2018) di Jeremy Harmer e Herbert Puchta, figure di spicco nel campo dell'insegnamento della lingua inglese e della metodologia didattica. Lo storytelling comincia, dunque, a essere utilizzato, sporadicamente, in una maniera nuova dagli insegnanti che decidono di inserire un filone narrativo nelle loro lezioni.

Seguiamo, dunque, anche noi questo nuovo percorso, cercando di trasformare le nostre lezioni in accattivanti racconti, in cui i concetti astratti diventano eroi, protagonisti di avventure meravigliose!

Cari colleghi insegnanti di lingue straniere: siccome la grammatica è, senz'altro, la parte più arida e noiosa che dobbiamo insegnare, vi propongo di cominciare a "storificare" gli argomenti grammaticali, di inventare le vostre proprie "grammastorie", e di condividerle poi con noi altri. In questo modo un giorno avremo una bella collezione di storielle grammaticali su vari argomenti, pronte a essere utilizzate in classe. Saremo, così, degli insegnanti che fanno la differenza e i nostri alluni torneranno a casa entusiasti delle loro lezioni di lingua!

Comincio io col presentare la mia storia grammaticale, non tanto per darla come esempio, ma piuttosto per stuzzicare il vostro interesse per la "storificazione"

grammaticale. Includo inoltre delle istruzioni su come presentare la storia alla lavagna per agevolare la comprensione della stessa e la memorizzazione dell'argomento grammaticale.

Articulandia

La storia fantastica degli articoli determinativi

C'era una volta, tanto tempo fa, un regno lontano che si chiamava Articulandia [l'insegnante scrive il nome alla lavagna]. Il re di questo regno si chiamava Determinus [l'insegnante scrive il nome alla lavagna].

Gli abitanti di Articulandia erano i *nomi*, dei personaggi abbastanza strani. Infatti, era molto difficile dire se questi abitanti erano troppo diversi o, anzi, se erano tutti uguali. Per questa ragione nessuno riusciva a distinguere tra maschi e femmine. E così c'era sempre questa incertezza sul genere dei nomi.

Così, il re Determinus decise di dare una legge per poter distinguere tra maschi e femmine. Un giorno disse: "D'ora in poi tutti i maschi saranno sempre accompagnati, ovunque vadano, dall'articolo *il*, e tutte le femmine dall'articolo *la*!" [l'insegnante divide la lavagna in due colonne e scrive *Maschile – IL*, nella prima e *Femminile – LA* nella seconda].

Questo articolo era in realtà una specie di carta di identità, che gli abitanti di Articulandia dovevano portare ben in vista. Ad esempio, il nome *ragazzo*, che era un maschio, doveva mettersi davanti *il*, mentre il nome *ragazza*, che era una femmina, doveva mettersi davanti *la* [l'insegnante scrive le due parole, nelle apposite colonne e scrive poi gli articoli giusti davanti a ognuno di loro].

Il re ha poi mandato messaggeri in tutto il regno per dire a tutti i maschi di farsi sempre accompagnare da *il* e a tutte le femmine di farsi accompagnare da *la*.

Che ne pensate? I cittadini di Articulandia hanno rispettato la legge o no? Come vale per tutte le leggi, la maggior parte di loro l'hanno rispettata, ma due gruppi di cittadini non hanno ubbidito.

Vediamo quali e perché non hanno ubbidito.

Il primo gruppo è quello delle vocali litigiose [l'insegnante scrive alla lavagna: *I. Vocali litigiose*]. Si chiamavano così perché erano famosissime nel regno per litigare sempre. Infatti, quando due vocali appartenenti a parole diverse s'incontravano, cominciavano a litigare così forte, che molti chiamerebbero questa una vera e propria lotta. Alla fine di questa lotta il più delle volte una

delle vocali spariva (e qui non si sa se semplicemente andava via o magari moriva nella lotta…).

Così, quando, all'ordine del re, la parola maschile *amico* [l'insegnante la scrive alla lavagna, nella prima colonna] si mise davanti l'articolo *il* [l'insegnante la scrive alla lavagna], le vocali *i* e *a* [l'insegnante fa un cerchio intorno alle due vocali] cominciarono a lottare e, chi pensate abbia vinto? La *a*, sicuramente, perché era più grande e perché aveva il sostengo delle altre vocali nella parola *amico*. E così la vocale *i* sparì per sempre [l'insegnante cancella la *i*]! Per ricordarsi del suo vecchio amico scomparso, la consonante *elle*, ormai rimasta da sola, si mise all'orecchio un orecchino [l'insegnante disegna un orecchino semicerchio]. E questo orecchino è diventato, poi, l'apostrofo [l'insegnante cancella l'orecchino e scrive l'apostrofo al suo posto].

La stessa cosa successe anche con la parola femminile *amica*, che, dopo la lotta tra le due vocali rimase con l'articolo *l'* davanti [l'insegnante riprende il percorso di sopra].

E così usiamo *l'* con tutte le altre parole, maschili o femminili, che cominciano per vocale. E il nostro re Determinus fu costretto ad accettare un nuovo articolo davanti alla vocale: *l'* (elle apostrofo).

Un altro gruppo di cittadini disubbidienti è quello delle consonanti sportive [l'insegnante scrive alla lavagna: *II. Consonanti sportive*].

Perché si chiamano sportive, secondo voi? Ovviamente perché gli piace tanto lo sport.

Sapete cosa fanno tre consonanti quando s'incontrano? Be', si portano una palla e cominciano a giocare a calcio.

E sapete qual è la consonate più sportiva di tutte? La *esse*! Infatti, quando è seguita da consonante, la *esse* diventa la cosiddetta *esse impura*, e non vuole far altro che giocare a calcio!

Dunque, quando la parola maschile *studente* si mise davanti l'articolo *il* [l'insegnante scrive alla lavagna, nella prima colonna, la parola *studente* e poi scrive l'articolo davanti a essa], e le tre consonanti s'incontrarono [l'insegnante fa un cerchio intorno alle tre consonanti], mandarono subito a casa la vocale *i* [l'insegnante cancella la *i* dalla parola *il*] e cominciarono a giocare a calcio [l'insegnante disegna una palla rotonda a destra della *elle*]. E così è nato l'articolo *lo*.

Ovviamente, la regola è valida non solo per la *esse impura*, ma anche per altri gruppi consonantici come *gn*, *ps*, *pn*, e persino per la *ics*, la *i greca* e la *zeta*, quelle lettere poco usate alla fine dell'alfabeto che, non avendo altro da fare, giocavano sempre a calcio per non annoiarsi. Tutte quante si mettono davanti

l'articolo *lo* [l'insegnante scrive i gruppi consonantici e le tre lettere alla lavagna].

Pensate sia successa la stessa cosa con le parole femminili con consonanti sportive? [l'insegnante scrive alla lavagna la parola femminile *studentessa*, nella seconda colonna, preceduta dall'articolo *la*].

Invece no!

Soltanto ai maschi piace giocare a calcio! Infatti, le femmine sono rimaste a casa a prepararsi per la grande festa organizzata dal re. Dunque, loro si sono accontentate dell'articolo *la* imposto dal re – anche per non infastidire il re che le aveva invitate alla grande festa organizzata al palazzo!

Per questo il nuovo articolo che il re fu costretto ad accettare era diverso solo per i maschi. Prendevano l'articolo *lo* soltanto i nomi maschili che cominciavano per consonante sportiva.

Alla fine, non avendo altra scelta, il re decise di modificare la legge e accettare tre tipi di articoli [l'insegnante sintetizza, alla lavagna, i tre casi presentati sotto]:

Gli articoli per i cittadini ubbidienti: la maggior parte dei nomi avrebbero usato l'articolo *il* per maschile e *la* per femminile.

Gli articoli per le vocali litigiose: le parole che iniziano con vocale avrebbero usato l'articolo *l'*, sia al maschile sia al femminile.

Gli articoli per le consonanti sportive: le parole maschili che iniziano per *s impura*, un gruppo consonantico come *GN*, *PS*, *PN*, oppure *X*, *Y*, *Z* avrebbero preso l'articolo *lo* – solo al maschile però, perché solo ai maschi piace il calcio!

E vissero felici e contenti!

[In seguito, l'insegnante propone agli allievi vari tipi di esercizi, presentati, però, sotto forma di viaggi immaginari in Articulandia, ognuno con uno scopo ben preciso: vedere se sono capaci di distinguere maschi da femmine in base alla loro carta di identità, distinguere tra cittadini ubbidienti, vocali litigiose e consonanti sportive, oppure attribuire la carta d'identità giusta ai vari cittadini, ecc.]

In conclusione, la sperimentazione del metodo di "storificazione" della grammatica ha mostrato un impatto sorprendente nel coinvolgimento degli studenti, confermando il potenziale dell'approccio narrativo nella didattica della lingua. "Articulandia" si è rivelata uno strumento efficace non solo per rendere accessibili concetti grammaticali complessi, ma anche per stimolare la partecipazione attiva e il desiderio di apprendere in un ambito spesso percepito come ostico. La narrazione si conferma quindi un veicolo potente per l'insegnamento: riesce a

trasformare le regole in avventure e le categorie grammaticali in personaggi memorabili.

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https://doi.org/10.47743/ilt-2024-1-8

Enhancing Medical Students' Reading Comprehension Skills through the VM 3.0 Project's Results

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the European project, titled "Digital Transformation of Histology and Histopathology by Virtual Microscopy (VM) for an Innovative Medical School Curriculum," which is funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ framework. It examines the translanguaging strategies employed and how the multilingual virtual slide library developed by the project was utilized to improve students' reading comprehension skills. Additionally, interpretation of the testimonials collected from teachers and students involved in the experiment provide valuable insights into the teaching and learning experiences.

KEYWORDS: *translanguaging, multilingual online resources, reading comprehension, medical students*

The European context and the Virtual Microscopy Project

The modern European context – marked by mobility, unprecedented advancement of digital technology, and globalization– has intensified the internationalization of universities and higher education. Now more than ever, universities must meet new

demands to enhance the quality of education and research and prepare students for a globalized world. Our project attempts to offer adaptive solutions to this new context through international collaboration and understanding.

The Digital Transformation of Histology and Histopathology by Virtual Microscopy for an Innovative Medical School Curriculum European Project (VM3.0) united medical universities in Greece, Spain, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Poland to implement programs centered around Virtual Microscopy. The objective of the VM3.0 project (Ref. no.: 2022-1-RO01-KA220-HED-000089017) is to modify the medical school curriculum for histology and histopathology across the European Union and convert the teaching of microscopy in medical universities into a digital format, thus reducing disparities in education systems among Eastern European Union countries, and improving the practical skills of undergraduate and postgraduate students in emerging medical fields. Incorporating cutting-edge technology in the classroom enhances student engagement and learning by establishing strong connections to real-world applications and facilitates the creation of reliable multilingual teaching resources.

The project targets healthcare professionals, faculty members of medical universities in the histology and histopathology departments, medical students, postgraduate students undergoing training in histology and histopathology, specialists in histology and histopathology, as well as medical universities and educational centers. The products of this project include standardized European curricula on histology and histopathology, a digital library of virtual slides in histology and histopathology, a guide for advanced virtual microscopy teaching, and an online course on virtual microscopy. The library, guide, and online training course for advanced VM instruction in microscopy are accessible in six languages: English, Romanian, French, Bulgarian, Polish, and Spanish. These multilingual learning tools aim to meet the needs of international medical students who may face language challenges in comprehending lectures, reading academic publications, and engaging in discussions, which hinder overall academic performance. Through our projects, students can gain advantages from the project's multilingual online resources, which enhance both their medical professional growth and their foreign language acquisition.

The target group

To identify the students' needs and interests in terms of language use and identify the required method necessary to disseminate the project's multilingual online resources, we administered a questionnaire to 40 students in March 2024. The questionnaire revealed several key learnings about the students' language use, desire for academic materials in their mother tongue, perceived language-related challenges in the classroom, and interest in foreign languages.

The questionnaire first showed that students generally spoke two languages, and some of them even five or six. English or French were the most common languages spoken but were rarely the first languages of those surveyed. Students also expressed a desire for the creation of academic materials in their mother tongue and stated that studying materials in foreign languages (most frequently French or English) led to a decrease in their comprehension of complex topics, and to a perceived inability to perceive nuances in medical terminology.

The questionnaire also revealed a key interest in foreign languages, as well as the expansion of resources in their mother tongue. In fact, when asked to identify a challenge they frequently faced, students reported that they found the comprehension of written materials in the English language a challenge and expressed a desire to expand on the availability of multilingual materials. Students who were unable to speak or understand English and French also worried about lower access to career opportunities and connected this to their decreased ability to understand class material. Finally, the questionnaire showed that students used all their linguistic repertoire to comprehend medical texts.

Considering our target group and our interest in enhancing the students' reading skills by making use of their linguistic repertoire, our research decided on translanguaging and not translation as a learning strategy. Translanguaging surpasses translation as an effective learning strategy for plurilingual students aiming to understand and demonstrate knowledge of medical texts. While translation is valuable for rendering meaning from one language to another, it imposes a rigid boundary between languages, potentially hindering deeper comprehension and fluid communication. Translanguaging, however, allows students to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire to make sense of complex material, integrating words, phrases, and concepts across languages within a cohesive framework. In the context of medical education, where nuanced understanding and precision are vital, translanguaging enables students to use familiar terminology from different languages, connecting complex ideas more intuitively. This method supports the dynamic use of language—students might use terminology in one language and elaborate or contextualize in another within the same sentence, creating a more accessible and personalized learning experience. Translanguaging fosters confidence and autonomy, reducing frustration by allowing students to rely on familiar linguistic resources, and aligning with Vygotsky's model of learning through social interaction. By recognizing the plurilingual competencies students already possess, translanguaging not only validates their linguistic identities but also promotes a holistic learning approach, supporting deeper, more flexible engagement with challenging medical texts. (Creese [et al], 2017; Laviosa, 2018; Garcia, 2014; Sato & Garcia, 2023)

The methodology: translanguaging

Translanguaging, introduced by Cen Williams in the 1990s, originated as a pedagogical practice known as *trawsieithu* within a bilingual Welsh/English educational program (Garcia, 2016). Initially, it denoted the fluid and dynamic linguistic practices of bilingual individuals who frequently alternate between languages, receiving input in one language and generating output in another to enhance comprehension. This practice demonstrated the complex methods by which bilingual individuals utilize their complete linguistic resources to enhance comprehension. The concept then gained popularity through the work of García and Leiva (2014), who expanded its application to educational contexts and advocated for its role in fostering inclusive and effective teaching practices.

The term "translanguaging" has evolved into a complex concept, incorporating multiple definitions and interpretations. Canagarajah (2011) argues that translanguaging transcends being merely an instructional strategy; it is a natural practice observable in multilingual classrooms. In many educational contexts, translanguaging occurs organically rather than through intentional teaching methods, mirroring the genuine language practices of learners. This viewpoint highlights the adaptability and resourcefulness of plurilingual learners, who effectively combine their languages to understand and engage with academic material.

Ofelia García's research (2014, 2016) is particularly influential in this regard, as it emphasizes the importance of incorporating the students' home languages into the educational process. By acknowledging and leveraging the full linguistic repertoire of learners, educators can enhance both language acquisition and content understanding. Ofelia García (2014) defines translanguaging in education as a sophisticated communicative practice where students and teachers draw on all the linguistic resources available to them. This approach challenges traditional notions of language separation, instead promoting an integrated view of language development that values the diverse linguistic backgrounds students bring to the classroom.

Therefore, translanguaging operates on multiple levels, serving as both an instructional tool and a theoretical framework. It offers a systematic method for educators to scaffold learning, making challenging academic material more accessible by allowing students to process information in their stronger language before transitioning to the target language. This function is particularly effective in complex subject areas, where understanding can be deepened through discussions and explanations in the students' home languages. By gradually introducing new vocabulary and concepts in the target language, educators can support students in building their knowledge base while also developing their language skills. (MacSwan, 2017; Duarte, 2018; Wei & Lin, 2019)

Beyond its practical applications, translanguaging carries significant symbolic and epistemological functions. Symbolically, it validates all languages present in the classroom, sending a clear message that these languages, along with the cultures they represent, are respected and valued. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of belonging and self-esteem among students, particularly those from minority linguistic backgrounds. It also bridges cultural and linguistic gaps, creating a more equitable educational environment where diversity is seen as an asset rather than a barrier. Epistemologically, translanguaging enhances both content and language learning by encouraging students to draw on their linguistic and cultural knowledge to explore and analyze academic subjects. This process can lead to deeper, more nuanced understandings and promote critical thinking skills as students compare, contrast, and synthesize information across languages. (García O. & Seltzer K., 2016; Ortega & Prada, 2020)

Results and discussion

Four lecturers and 40 students from "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iaşi, Romania, took part in the experiment as an evolution of the VM 3.0 project. The experiment showed how to exploit the materials created within the project to develop the students' not only medical but also language competencies. It is important to mention that the lecturers involved had seldom used the translanguaging method prior to the experiment. In addition, none of the students had prior exposure to this methodology. After the experiment, both students and lecturers were asked to answer open-ended questions about the methodology, its drawbacks, challenges, and benefits.

The lecturers who teach English and French to medical students utilized the multilingual texts created by the project, and in-class discussions to highlight several key translanguaging strategies and promote reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and mastery of the subject. The lecturers first assigned medical texts as homework which used the translanguaging method by encouraging students to use all their linguistic repertoire to comprehend the medical content and do their tasks. These texts, or "parallel texts", featured both the students' native languages and the target language, and accompanied the reading with activities to develop strategic reading and note-taking techniques. Translanguaging strategies in reading and note-taking enabled students to leverage their entire linguistic repertoire, promoting a fuller comprehension of complex material. The lecturers were then encouraged to use translanguaging techniques in the classroom setting through lecture to promote student reflection on the material presented.

After both the at-home and in-class exercises, the students and lecturers agreed that translanguaging not only empowered students in multilingual classrooms but also enhanced their potential as future professionals in multilingual settings.

Reading strategies

Providing students with medical texts in both the target language (English) and their home languages allows a dual-layered reading experience. By first reading in their home language, students can grasp the overall context and content of the material. Following this, reading the English version aids in building specialized vocabulary and understanding of medical terminology. This sequential reading process promotes comprehension while allowing students to focus on linguistic nuances without losing the primary meaning of the text.

Creating bilingual glossaries of key medical terms enables students to cross-reference vocabulary quickly, reinforcing the acquisition of essential terms. Each glossary entry includes the term in both the home language and English, alongside brief definitions. This tool serves as an accessible reference, particularly in fields like medicine, where precise terminology is critical.

Encouraging students to summarize sections of the medical text first in their home language and then in English reinforces comprehension while ensuring that students internalize the material. Summarizing in their home language allows them to articulate ideas freely, while translating into English builds vocabulary and language skills essential for professional communication.

Collaborative reading activities support comprehension through peer discussion and language practice. For instance, students can read portions of a medical text in their home language within a reading group, followed by discussion in English. This approach fosters deeper understanding of the material and improves the students' abilities to express complex ideas across languages. Using a two-column system where one column is in the home language and the other in English organizes materials in a visually structured format. This division makes it easier for students to review material in both languages and strengthens their ability to navigate between languages effectively.

Providing medical texts with annotations in the students' home languages serves as a scaffold for complex terms and concepts. Students read annotated sections in their home language to clarify difficult points, then engage with the English text, using these annotations as a guide. This approach ensures a smoother transition to reading in the target language, allowing students to focus on new vocabulary without confusion over fundamental concepts.

Translanguaging note-taking strategies with parallel texts

Allowing students to take notes in both their home language and English provides flexibility in capturing their thoughts. Students may jot down complex explanations in their home language, while using English for medical terms and concise points. This bilingual notetaking approach creates a bridge between comprehension and professional language use, enhancing both understanding and vocabulary retention.

When creating outlines of medical texts, students can organize main headings in English with sub-points in their home language. This method aids in the logical organization of information and reinforces the connection between general ideas in English and detailed comprehension in the home language.

Permitting language switching while taking notes enables students to record detailed concepts in their home language, reserving English for specific terminology and short phrases. This technique offers cognitive flexibility, allowing students to fully capture complex ideas without being constrained by vocabulary limitations in the target language. Concept maps and diagrams provide a visual representation of information with labels in both languages. Such maps allow students to categorize terms and concepts, connecting home language explanations with target language terminology. This bilingual visual aid reinforces relationships between terms and concepts, aiding in memory retention.

Criticism to translanguaging-based approaches

Criticism of translanguaging-based approaches as provided by the lecturers involved in the experiment centers around concerns related to educational efficacy, language development, assessment challenges, and broader sociocultural implications. They argue that relying on translanguaging could hinder the students' development of full proficiency in the target language (often the dominant or instructional language, like English in many contexts). When students use their home language as a bridge, they might not engage enough with the target language to reach an advanced or academic level.

Some educators worry that students may fall short of academic standards if they are not given consistent opportunities to fully immerse themselves in the target language. They argue that translanguaging can lead to code-mixing or a blending of languages that dilutes linguistic integrity. They fear that this might result in students acquiring neither language with a full, standard form and possibly developing a hybrid that lacks formal recognition.

In classrooms with students from multiple language backgrounds, managing translanguaging practices can be complex and time-consuming. The lecturers argue that attempting to accommodate numerous languages in one setting can lead to logistical difficulties and uneven support for students. When students share some, but not all, of the same language backgrounds, translanguaging practices may inadvertently exclude those who do not speak a particular language, creating a need for more nuanced, individualized instruction.

Switching between languages can increase cognitive load, which might distract from deep engagement with complex concepts, particularly in advanced or technical subjects. For instance, in a subject like science or mathematics, frequent language switching may cause students to focus more on linguistic transitions than on core content comprehension.

Some lecturers suggest that translanguaging may fragment the learning process, as students might split their focus across languages rather than deeply engaging with material in one language. This could make it harder for students to develop strong language skills and content mastery simultaneously.

Challenges in implementing translanguaging practices in education

Translanguaging, the practice of using multiple languages in the classroom to facilitate learning, presents a range of opportunities for fostering multilingualism and inclusive education. However, the lecturers involved in the experiment have stated that the implementation of translanguaging strategies in educational settings is often hindered by several significant challenges. These challenges can be categorized into issues related to teacher preparedness, curriculum and policy constraints, resource limitations, and assessment difficulties.

One of the primary challenges in implementing translanguaging practices is the lack of adequate training for teachers. Many educators may not have received the necessary professional development to effectively incorporate translanguaging strategies into their teaching. This lack of training can result in teachers feeling unprepared to manage multilingual classrooms, leading to a reliance on monolingual teaching methods that do not fully support the linguistic diversity of their students. Additionally, teachers may not be proficient in the multiple languages spoken by their students. This language barrier can make it challenging for educators to provide meaningful support for translanguaging practices. Without proficiency in the languages used by the students, teachers might struggle to guide them in leveraging their full linguistic repertoire, thereby limiting the potential benefits of translanguaging in the classroom.

Education systems that prioritize standardized testing often present a significant barrier to translanguaging. Standardized tests are typically administered in a single language, usually the dominant or official language of instruction. This focus on a monolingual approach to testing discourages the use of multiple languages in the classroom, as students are assessed based on their proficiency in only one language. Consequently, translanguaging practices may be seen as counterproductive in environments where success is measured by performance on these standardized tests.

Traditional assessment methods pose a significant challenge in accurately reflecting the linguistic abilities of students who use translanguaging. Standardized tests and other common forms of assessment are typically designed to evaluate proficiency in a single language, which does not capture the full range of a student's linguistic capabilities. As a result, students who engage in translanguaging may be unfairly assessed as underperforming, despite their multilingual competencies.

Finding appropriate metrics to assess the students' understanding and skills across multiple languages is another challenge associated with translanguaging. The complexity of evaluating multilingual competence requires assessment tools that are sensitive to the fluidity and dynamic nature of language use in translanguaging contexts. However, developing and implementing such metrics within existing educational frameworks is a difficult task, often leading to a continued reliance on traditional, monolingual assessments.

The design of the existing curricula often lacks the flexibility to accommodate translanguaging practices. Traditional curricula are usually structured around a monolingual framework, which does not account for the diverse linguistic needs of plurilingual students. Implementing translanguaging strategies would require significant adjustments to the curriculum, such as integrating multilingual resources and allowing for language fluidity in teaching and assessment. Another challenge in promoting translanguaging in schools is the lack of teaching materials and resources that support multilingual education. Most educational materials are designed for monolingual instruction, leaving teachers without the tools they need to effectively implement translanguaging strategies. The absence of bilingual or multilingual resources can limit the ability of educators to create a classroom environment that values and utilizes the linguistic diversity of students.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes better teacher training, flexible curricula, adequate resources, and innovative assessment methods. Only by overcoming these obstacles can schools fully embrace the potential of translanguaging to support the diverse linguistic needs of all students.

Benefits of the translanguaging strategies as signaled by the students themselves

In our project, the students appreciated the practical integration of the multiple languages they knew into their learning process as they were able to use their linguistic repertoire within the same task or activity. This allowed them to fluidly switch between languages to enhance comprehension and expression. In addition, translanguaging also encouraged the students to annotate a medical text in English with notes in their home language and vice versa, promoting deeper understanding.

Translanguaging enabled the students to use their stronger language skills to support understanding of material in their weaker language. They admitted that when faced with challenging medical terminology in English, they were able to use their home language to annotate and make sense of the concepts, then revisit the material in English with greater clarity. Translanguaging allows students to use their home language to fully grasp the complex medical concepts before transitioning to the target language, ensuring a deeper and more accurate understanding. This strategy also ensured the acquisition of the medical terms in the languages the students used when reading the text and making sense of it.

The students also stated that translanguaging mirrored the real-world practice when they needed to switch between languages and dialects when interacting with diverse patient populations. It acknowledged that effective communication in healthcare often involved mixing languages to ensure patient understanding and care. Translanguaging practices in education train students for such scenarios. A few students agreed that translanguaging raised their awareness of their learning processes and strategies for overcoming linguistic challenges. By constantly negotiating meaning between languages, they probably developed better problem-solving skills and adaptability, which were essential for medical practice.

Finally, the students appreciated that translanguaging recognized and valued the students' home languages, fostering an inclusive environment where all linguistic backgrounds were respected. The experiment made them feel valued and included, which could boost their confidence and participation.

Conclusions

Although the study had limitations, such as the small number of students and lecturers involved and the brief duration of the experiment, its results are still worth considering. The translanguaging activities proposed by the lecturers emphasized the integrated and dynamic use of multiple languages within the same task or conversation, leveraging skills such as fluid language switching, critical thinking, collaboration, multimodal

literacy, reflective abilities, and cognitive/metacognitive skills. The use of the students' full linguistic repertoire enabled them to enhance comprehension, communication, and learning in a more flexible and inclusive manner. Translanguaging, with its emphasis on fluid and dynamic language use, could be thus favored in contexts requiring deep comprehension and practical application of complex material, such as in medical education.

While translanguaging presents an innovative approach for multilingual classrooms, critics emphasize the need for careful consideration of these potential drawbacks. They argue for a balanced approach that integrates rigorous training, clear assessment criteria, and sufficient resources to maximize the benefits of translanguaging. Addressing these criticisms could help create a more inclusive, effective application of translanguaging that supports multilingual students without compromising their proficiency or educational outcomes in the target language.

In summary, translanguaging represents a transformative approach to education that acknowledges and harnesses the full linguistic capabilities of students. By integrating translanguaging into mainstream education, educators can create more inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environments that recognize and respect linguistic diversity. This approach not only improves language and content acquisition but also fosters a richer and more equitable educational experience for all students.

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The Project LANGVET – IA: Conceiving Linguistic and Pedagogical Content with the Help of Artificial Intelligence Tools in the Field of Veterinary Medicine

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ABSTRACT

The presentation of the ongoing project "Conceiving linguistic and pedagogical content using artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the field of veterinary medicine", funded by the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie and implemented by the University of Life Sciences "Ion Ionescu de la Brad" in Iaşi, Romania, highlights the background, objectives, main strategies and key objectives of an interdisciplinary international collaboration that strives to advance foreign language education by developing AI-enabled content and tools for both teachers and students.

KEYWORDS: *language education, FLT, artificial intelligence, veterinary medicine, didactics*

The LANGVET – IA project, titled "Conceiving linguistic and pedagogical content using artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the field of veterinary medicine,"[1] led by Lecturer Dr. Elena Velescu from the University of Life Sciences "Ion Ionescu de la Brad" in Iaşi, Romania is an initiative funded by the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie that brings together a diverse team of experts in linguistics, didactics, veterinary medicine, and information engineering from institutions such as "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi, "Ion Creangă" Pedagogical University of Chişinău (Moldova), "Akaki Tsereteli" State University (Georgia), University of Rijeka (Croatia), and the "Al. Philippide" Institute of Philology of the Romanian Academy in Iaşi.

[1] **Acknowledgement**: The LANGVET-IA project "Conceiving Linguistic and Pedagogical Content with the Help of Artificial Intelligence Tools in the Field of Veterinary Medicine" is funded by the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie through the AUF-ECO 2024 call—Support for Francophone Scientific Research in Central and Eastern Europe—RESCI-ECO, and runs from July 1, 2024, to August 31, 2025.

The project seeks to address critical needs in language education, particularly in the teaching of French as a foreign language, through the integration of new technologies and artificial intelligence (AI). Primarily, there is a growing necessity for pedagogical tools that harness contemporary technological innovations, aligning with the objective of modernizing instructional methodologies to enhance student engagement through AI's practical applications in language learning. Additionally, it is increasingly essential to link the knowledge and competencies students acquire during their academic training to workforce demands as AI becomes more prominent.

Another project aim is to promote the use of AI tools among veterinary medicine and language students and their instructors by integrating these tools into learning and professional practice. To this end, the project will develop online educational resources and linguistic resources tailored to professional communication, available in three languages: French, English, and Romanian.

A significant dimension of this project involves the development of transversal skills, emphasizing the interplay between specialized terminology and intercultural components, such as representations of animals. A further objective includes the creation of multilingual glossaries that delineate veterinary medicine's linguistic scope, complemented by instructional materials that deepen student comprehension.

Despite AI's growing relevance in language education, there remains a notable deficit in terminological studies within the veterinary field, especially those addressing multilingual contexts (e.g., French, English, Romanian). Bridging these gaps is facilitated by the integration of AI into instructional approaches, providing educators with essential tools for fostering autonomous, engaging learning experiences. Nevertheless, resources and strategies for training educators in AI utilization remain limited. Beyond enhancing instructional practices, this project underscores the importance of connecting educational activities with research. All participating educators are committed to advancing both their pedagogical methods and their scientific contributions through publications and scholarly dissemination.

By merging language education, didactics, and intercultural studies, this initiative aims to elevate the visibility of language instruction within regional universities. It is anticipated to contribute to the development of these institutions, enrich their academic offerings, and strengthen the quality of teaching and research personnel.

Key objectives include:

- Developing educational resources for veterinary terminology.
- Increasing participation of non-language specialist students and Modern Languages instructors from Central and Eastern Europe in international training and research within a multilingual and multicultural framework.
- Promoting the generation and dissemination of knowledge on language instruction through scientific collaboration and participation in academic events.

To achieve these goals, the project pursues several strategies:

1. **Tool standardization**: By aligning veterinary tools and competencies with international standards, the project aims to facilitate student and researcher mobility and encourage open exchanges.
2. **Skill enhancement**: Improving student competencies in clinical practice and digital AI contexts to prepare them effectively for the workforce.
3. **Interdisciplinary language education**: Strengthening linguistic diversity and intercultural awareness in veterinary studies.
4. **Multidisciplinary content development**: Producing innovative content to support students and instructors in professional training.
5. **Quality improvement**: Enhancing education quality, innovation, and internationalization through global cooperation.
6. **Integrative language and specialty education**: Promoting student autonomy and active participation by blending language and subject-specific learning.
7. **Terminology research**: Conducting research on specialized veterinary terminology to produce glossaries and terminological databases.
8. **Competency development**: Enhancing educator and learner skills in interdisciplinary education with AI through specialized workshops.
9. **International training participation**: Strengthening student and teacher engagement from Central and Eastern Europe in international programs.
10. **Collaborative research**: Producing a collective study on project outcomes and developing educational resources for language and veterinary educators.

11. **AI Integration in language teaching**: Exploring AI applications in language instruction, such as: generating pedagogical resources like exercises and games, supporting language accuracy through error correction and assisting in text production to develop writing skills.

The task distribution among project partners was organized based on their professional expertise in order to foster effective collaboration and achieve common goals. Responsibilities were divided into four main domains: (I) veterinary medicine, (II) language, terminology, and translation studies, (III) language didactics and AI integration, and (IV) intercultural studies. Each partner institution designated a team of researchers to contribute to the project, ensuring a multidisciplinary and comprehensive approach.

Key activities for each team include:

- **Organization and participation in team meetings**: regular meetings facilitate coordination, sharing of updates, and progress assessment, fostering communication and synergy among partners.
- **Coordination of short-term mobility programs**: partners host and coordinate expert mobility programs for educators and researchers, promoting cross-disciplinary training and knowledge exchange.
- **Development and publication of educational materials**: collaborative efforts focus on creating, analyzing, revising, and publishing educational resources aligned with the project's interdisciplinary focus, ensuring high-quality output.
- **Project presentation and dissemination**: the project's results are presented at workshops, study days, and international conferences, enhancing visibility within the academic community.

Student involvement: students from partner universities actively participate through virtual working sessions and collaborative meetings, beginning in July 2024, engaging with their peers and instructors from different countries.

Expected outcomes

This collaborative effort aims to produce meaningful outcomes, including:

- **Diversified educational content**: the creation and dissemination of innovative materials that integrate language, veterinary medicine, and cultural studies.

- **Enhanced learning environments**: AI tools are anticipated to improve engagement and motivation, leading to more effective learning experiences.
- **Contemporary teaching methods**: integrating AI and information technologies, the project offers modern, interactive teaching approaches that enhance learning.
- **Efficient language and terminology acquisition**: AI-supported methods are expected to improve language learning efficiency, especially for veterinary terminology.
- **Support for academics at risk**: the project enables academics from crisis-affected countries, especially within the AUF network, to remain connected to the global scientific community.
- **Promotion of French in education and research**: through an international conference and research dissemination, the project raises the profile of French as a language of education and inquiry.
- **Development of specialized language instruction in veterinary medicine**: targeted training and research initiatives aim to strengthen language education specific to veterinary studies.
- **Technology and expertise transfer**: the project promotes the transfer of ICT and AI expertise into language education and veterinary medicine, driving innovation in these fields.
- **Creation and renewal of teaching materials**: new and updated resources will enrich educational materials in both language and veterinary fields.

This initiative aims to establish sustainable, innovative educational practices that enhance learning experiences and strengthen international research and collaboration.

By integrating research and training to equip students and educators with AI tools for language learning and veterinary medicine, this project—supported by an interdisciplinary team—aims to advance the education of future specialists in the life sciences. It also seeks to enhance the international profile of Languages for Specific Purposes instruction at regional universities by embedding advanced research within a modern, sustainable teaching model.

Project valorization strategies:

- **Publication of results**: the project will produce interim and final outputs, including scientific articles, pedagogical guides, and a collective volume, ensuring the broad dissemination of findings.
- **Dissemination at conferences and regional events**: by presenting at conferences and study days, and through article publications across the region, the project will encourage scholarly engagement with its outcomes.
- **Online knowledge sharing**: results and resources will be accessible via online platforms, educational websites, and partner university portals, ensuring widespread access.
- **Educational resource development**: pedagogical materials will be available on partner institutions' online platforms, supporting enhanced teaching and learning practices. Additionally, a comprehensive database of veterinary terminology will be created as a valuable tool for students and educators.
- **AI Integration in language courses**: AI tools will be incorporated into language courses across member universities, promoting innovation in language teaching.

Through these strategies, the project intends to ensure the sustainability of language education within veterinary medicine and related fields. By utilizing online platforms, fostering international collaboration, and integrating AI into language instruction, the initiative aims to serve as a model for innovative educational practices in academic and professional contexts.

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